

ISLE of MAN TT 2013

Isle of Man, Ale of Man, Dunlop & Mc (Guinness) – this is the visit to biking heaven!



Sunday 2nd June 2013; 6 lads, 6 bikes, 6 days of biking heaven. We'd saved for a year for this trip, Big Nige booked the ferry in July 2012 – such is the demand for places that you need to be on the money for this trip. But boy was it worth it! Let me start by saying that it costs quite a lot to go the IOM TT, the Steam Packet company that run the only ferry in and out have the monopoly on travel if you want to take a vehicle to the island but don't let that put you off, because in my opinion, I'd pay double! The IOM during TT fortnight is incredible!

This place is awesome! It's estimated 50,000 bikers arrive for TT fortnight, doubling the population and it feels like it – there are bikes of every shape, size and make, from Harleys to Hyabuses and Tiger cubs to Tiger explorers and in between you'll see thousands of GSXR's and Fireblade's. These were joined by 6 dirtbikes from Caerphilly.

We loaded the vans early Sunday morning, Andy Morgan took his van with Little Nige and Chairman Mark and arrived at Big Nige's house 45 minutes early, obviously excited to be 'off on holiday'.

Big Nige had to wait for Ian Craig and Jason in 'Spreads' van which they borrowed at short notice (thanks Paul) and they arrived 15 minutes late.

With everything packed and Andy and Little Nige having used the facilities at Big Niges, we were off – kind of on time. We'd been warned that the ferry company were being strict on arrival times and

turning people away if they didn't arrive 2 hours before sailing so we belted over the bridge and up the M5, M6 to Heysham. We'd organised some parking in advance and arrived on time but thought it best to let them know that we'd be there for 6 days and no sooner had we confirmed that everything was ok, we were approached by a guy asking if we had permission – fair enough !

Now the fun starts. Carrying a week's worth of kit, including tents, sleeping bags, camping chairs, clothes, riding gear etc is not easy on an enduro bike. Some of the boys opted for bungees to the rear sub frame, some opted for the huge ruck sack. Chairman Mark opted for the MAN bag – a Gi-normous sports bag and boy was it big, put it this way, it needed two assistants to lift the thing onto his back and we reckon it was big enough for Little Nige to climb into! A couple of photos and micky taking and we were off.

One mile to the port was all it needed, thank god, with all that kit the enduro bikes were less than happy with the extra weight. But the early start was worth it as the boys loaded the bikes on the ferry and found their seats in the bar for the four hour crossing.

Arriving at Douglas in the evening sunshine the news reached us that Michael Dunlop had picked up his first win and that the weather forecast was good all week, sorted.

A quick blast through the road works towards Quarter Bridge took us to the campsite at Douglas Rugby club. Big Nige sorted the necessary and we tried to find a pitch in amongst the 300 or something tents already pitched.

20 minutes of sweating later the tents were pitched and we were off to find some sustenance – how about Bushy's beer tent!

You quickly realise that IOM is totally geared to providing you, the punter, with a good time. At Bushy's you can have a beer, and watch the live band (normally rock) or have a go on the Fireblade wheelie demonstrator or even go for a bungee jump. If you stick around you'll see a wet Tshirt competition if they have enough volunteers.

By 10pm and with the sun just going down (stays lighter in the evening and gets light earlier as its further north) and having consumed several rounds of tipple, the lads had avoided the bungee and were ready for bed, Monday was race day!

The course closes at 9:30am. Quarter Bridge is on the course so if you ain't out of the car park by 9:30, you ain't leaving! The boys were out by 9.20. Andy Morgan was a bit tender after sampling some local wine the night before. He'd left a nice little patch of carrot chunks just outside his tent after saying good morning to hughey. Everyone else was ready for the off. A blast past Braddon bridge following the course took us through Union Mills, Glen Helen, Crosby and on to the Cronk-Y-Voddy straight. This is one of the fastest sections of the course as the riders hit top gear and fly flat out down the straight at 180mph.

The boys parked the bikes midway down the straight, two minutes later they shut the road! We settled down on the bank to watch the spectacle - perfect silence. Calm before the storm!

With just about a dozen fans and a couple of marshalls on the bank it was a quiet wait till the start. Big Nige had a radio so we were able to listen to what was happening at the start. James Hillier number one was off, down Bray hill, through Quarter bridge, Braddon Bridge, Crosby. We waited.

Then the sound of an engine flat out before Hillier appeared on the brow of the hill in the distance. He flew past at an amazing pace, we were within touching distance of this guy doing 180mph+. He zings past and takes the next bend without shutting off! WOW! Less than ten seconds later was the next, Cam Donald, followed by John McGuinness, Guy Martin, Bruce Ansty and Michael Dunlop. Each one flat out not three feet away. Mind blowing! Each flew past with the throttle pinned and didn't shut off despite the right hander at the end of the straight.

The number 7 MV Agusta ridden by Gary Johnson flew past and assaulted the ear drums with a boom of exhaust, awesome. The newbies amongst us were blown away!

Four Laps of racing later and although Andy Morgan slept through most of it, the boys were full of awe. Although the roads remain closed between races we were conveniently positioned at the end of a nice little green lane. Directly behind our stop at Cronk-y-Voddy, the lane took us out to the roads and the outside of the course. We headed for the seaside town of Peel and to a pub on the seafront for a meal and a quick pint. A blast around the coast road and back in land took us to Kirk Michael and back onto the edge of the course. Parked up, we were looking for a nice spot to view. We wandered past the pub and spotted a nice garden right opposite – Mark had a word with the guys sat on the bank and next thing you know we're in the best spot in Kirk Michael village. Three corners and a dip through the village saw the riders bounce at 150mph+ from kirb to kirb right in front of us – amazing, frightening, mind blowing. Think of something fast then double it! Incredible!

The race ends and we here on the radio that Michael Dunlop is again victorious, two from two!

Within 30 seconds of the 'roads open car' passing through the course is fully populated with umpteen bikes, cars and vans going about their business, right back to normal – surreal!

With the racing over for the day big Nige suggests the only place to go next is the Gooseneck, for a bit of people watching. So with a blast up the road to Ramsey, along with 50,000 other riders, and a quick stop at the supermarket for choc ices, we get to the bottom of the Mountain Road only to find it's closed! But rather than wait in the queue for 15 minutes until the cops open it again and prompted by Jason, big Nige opts for the green lane that loops around the mountain and ends at the Gooseneck. This green lane was not very green however, it was actually grey, slate in fact, and a real test of pushing and shoving and smoking tyres. Plus we met a couple of lads going the opposite way and with only enough room for one bike in the gully it was a bit of a squeeze. But sure enough, the lane took us right to the Gooseneck, a shame then that the road, by now, was already open, it would have been a lot easier to wait in the queue!

The Gooseneck is just good fun to watch. It seems like every rider on the island is taking advantage of the two lane, one way system with no speed limit that is the mountain road section of the TT course. Every one of them thinks he's John McGuinness. They tear around the corner sometimes four abreast and pin the throttle up the hill onto the mountain. The occasional sports car driver, van driver, even mum in the people mover with the kids in the back adds to the mix and almost all are

there for the same reason. Amazing stuff. We witnessed a few close calls and if the gouges in the soil bank that we were sat on are anything to go by, quite a few must have come a cropper.

Having seen enough of the fun we were about to join in and get across the mountain course ourselves when the Police closed the road again, an incident on the mountain had forced closure. Bummer! So, stuck at the Gooseneck, we opted for another green lane which took us back out across the mountain in a big loop eventually dropping back into Ramsey and heading down the coast road back to Douglas and through the Quarter Bridge and on to the campsite. Time for a shower and another visit to Bushy's!

Tuesday is chill day! No racing so we had a lie in. Although, since the sun comes up a bit earlier this far north, we were beginning to sweat in the tents by 8am.

After a general lounge around and chinwag we decided we should go do a bit of something so kitted up and headed off for a few trails.

It was midday and it was hot and dusty. We'd headed up the middle of island going North. Mostly stone tracks passing through numerous gates climbing onto open moorland, enjoying the view of the coast before dropping down the valley to the gate and crossing the road onto another stoney track climbing over the mountain and which had a mile or so of small jumps about 2 feet high, spaced about 30 yards apart and all uphill allowing jump after jump so that provided some entertainment. At the end of the track we came to a 'Road ahead closed' sign which can usually be safely ignored on a dirtbike but the IOM highway engineering department were not kidding – this road was closed! We passed a couple of Belgians on road bikes before turning the corner to a steep downhill narrow track between two fences. The winter weather had done a proper job with big washouts for almost 100 yards, in places the holes were above your head and just about wide enough for a bike. Since there was no other way down, Andy Morgan on the light weight two stroke went first. For the first 10 feet he had to push the bike along a ledge no wider than the tyres above a four foot drop. Then the ledge ran out! Fair play, he made it all the way down – on his own. But that only convinced the rest of us that we had to find another way down. With a bit of detective work we found a hole in the fence on the edge of the forest and after a bit of manhandling we were back on the track alongside Andy with little more than a bit of pushing and shoving, sorted!

We dropped through the forest and headed down into Ramsey and onto the sea front, following the crowds and the signs to the Ramsey Sprint. The sprint is a quarter mile 'run what you bring' on the sea front. With the Sun shining and the place packed, we picked up some grub and an icecream before watching the action. Big Nige even managed to arrange for the Red Arrows RAF display team to turn up just as we ordered the Icecreams – impressive!

After a couple of hours of watching everything from Drag Hyabusas to Honda step thru's and even a mobility scooter (complete with chair and shopping basket – and what sounded like a 750 engine) all hitting the quarter mile in less than 10 seconds, we set off for the Gooseneck again with more choc ices. This time we used the road – around the hairpin and onto the Gooseneck to park up and see the action. 10 minutes later a cop car came around the corner and stopped – a sure sign that they were about to close the road. Ian had a word and the cop reckoned it'd be closed in five minutes so we saddled up and cracked on before he pulled the barrier across. After a few miles big Nige opted for a short green lane just off the side of the course. Riding down the track we came to a narrow foot

bridge that provided a path over the bog so we rode over the bridge, turned round and rode back. By the time we got back on the course they must have closed the road because it was empty – and we had the place to ourselves! Bloody Marvellous! We flew across the mountain course doing a Michael Dunlop impression, little Nige even got his knee down – chunky tired dirtbikes doing all of 65mph around the Verandah like Connor Cummins. We got to the Bungalow and the fun stopped. The cops were there and we could see the reason for closure – they were towing a broken down bus over the mountain course at about 10mph. Hey ho. It was fun while it lasted. Since we now had a wait on our hands, we rode up to Joey Dunlop's lifesize bronze statue (sat on his Honda Fireblade) which overlooks the Bungalow. Whilst waiting we had a German guy take a picture of the Caerphilly boys with Joey.

20 minutes later they opened the road and we completed the course back towards Douglas before heading south to the campsite – a quick shower and we were off again – you've guessed it – Bushys!

Wednesday is race day.

A bit of a lie in for some (Big Nige) meant a rush for the others but we were outside of the course by 9:50am and fuelled up with petrol and pockets full of nosh – we were heading for Windy corner, a spot on the back side of the mountain course. We rode the Douglas sea front between the tram lines whilst overtaking the cars and followed the coast road North. We hit the lanes and climbed slowly onto the mountain on a stoney, twisty, narrow track eventually arriving just behind the commentary point. A word with the marshalls and they allowed us into the field alongside the track whereupon we all got our heads down for a bit of kip.

Windy corner was great for watching a high speed approach, 90 right and full throttle shift into top gear travelling away down the mountain. The conditions were perfect and by lap four the leaders were very tight. But it was Michael Dunlop who took another victory.

After race one we kitted up and out through the gate back onto the green lane heading down the coast and on to a new vantage point next to the Church at Crosby. As luck would have it they serve curry and rice plus tea and cakes all day – result. Just time to scoff some nosh before the side cars started flying through then the lightweights. By the end of the day we were fed up of the sun and seeking some shade. As the roads opened we headed straight back to the campsite for an instant barbeque then off to Bushy's.

Thursday was our last full day and was trailride day.

The boys had a Lie in till 10am, although Ian Craig was up at 6am (again) after his third airbed went flat – whoever said that the airbeds in the skip might be ok were wrong!

By 12 noon we decided we'd better get a shift on so kitted up and headed South. The Millenium way is a lane through the middle of the island and broken by some road work took us further south covering some dusty stone track, and open moorland. Heading southwest we picked up some slate lanes around the coast before stopping for some pictures by the seaside. Big Nige suggested we might be ready for ice cream after the next lane – and that we'd probably earn it!

We headed North West to the infamous 'slab' at Glen Maye. One word can describe this beauty - Oooofffff.

A narrow opening at the side of the road leads to an even narrower rock gully that begins to climb. A fallen tree opens up the gully but makes it almost impossible to hit the first slab straight on and with a 45 degree climb plus 45 degree off camber you need a bit of momentum to tackle this baby. Throw in some flowing water and low hanging braches and you get the picture. We opted for ropes and dragged the bikes up one at a time. After 45 mins we'd travelled about 50 yards!

Next was another slate slab again off camber and climbing. The boys were worried but Andy Morgan showed how much grip was available and flew up it on the Two stroke. Would the big thumpers do so well? One by one we all rode the slab whilst being filmed by iphone by Ian Craig. Pretty boring really as everyone stayed upright. At the top of the slab was the remainder of the stream bed which was split into two valleys, both only bike width and maybe 8 feet deep – 50 yards of slog. Andy Morgan fronted up and rode the thing without any help, manhandling the KTM to the top before stripping to his waist and collapsing on the grass bank and laughing at everybody else pushing and shoving. After another hour of pushing and pulling in the blazing sunshine we got to the top. Almost 3 hours to cover maybe 500 yards. Time for icecream. A run down to Peel and pub lunch followed by a larger than average wafer cone left us knackered but contented. Only thing left was to complete a lap of the course. So we joined the course and went clockwise towards Ramsey. The plan was a short stop at the Gooseneck but Mark Evans had his race face on and blasted past the turning on the back wheel trying to please the crowd. Since its one way and everyone else had stopped, Mark was on his own – at least until he phoned Big Nige to say he was at the Creg having a drink. Without too much convincing we all agreed a pint at the Creg would be acceptable and blasted across the mountain course whilst being passed by every other biker on the island. The Creg-Ny-Bar pub is an iconic part of the course and was full of riders enjoying the evening sunshine and watching the loony's fly past. We had a beer, took some pictures and headed off towards Douglas, still on the course, we reached the Grand Stand and parked the bikes in the Pit lane before visiting the souvenir shops to pick up a few momentos. A short ride down Bray Hill and around to the campsite completed the full lap of the TT course.

At the campsite we packed some stuff for the early start then headed off Bushy's. Thursday night must be the start of the weekend for the locals as everywhere was rammed. We stuck around till after eleven then picked up a take away before trying and failing to get a taxi hoping to get some sleep before the 4am start to catch the ferry at 6.

We turned up at the port by 5am and discovered we were on the fast ferry two hour crossing - result. By 9am we were loading the vans for the four hour drive home.

An awesome trip, definitely worth the visit and even better on a dirty bike. Roll on next year.

Ride report: Ian Craig.