

Racing Memories from a bygone year

My First Race

By Barrington Day

I believe that everybody remembers their first real race, here is an account of mine, perhaps there are other riders with similar memories.

The date was April 17th 1954 (yes, that's 65 years ago) 10 days before my 16th birthday. The day was dry and sunny, although not too warm. At the time I was a member of the Weston Wheelers, living in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset.



My Father gave me a lift to Highbridge, here I was picked up in a Land Rover with the rest of the team. They were all senior riders; I was the only junior. They had been collected up from several different locations, for the journey to Taunton.

The race, 'The South Somerset Road Race' was organised by the Somerset Road Club, there were two races, one for 1st and 2nd category riders (75 miles), the other for 3^{rds} and juniors. I was entered in the latter. The race would be held over two laps of a 25-mile circuit a total of 50 miles, the maximum that a junior was

allowed to race. The circuit included the dreaded Hayne Hill about 3 miles after the start.

After unloading our bikes and baggage, the first stop was the Machine Examiners, they checked gears, brakes, checked that the 'tubs' (tubulars) were glued on correctly, also that your machine was in a clean condition. I then handed my nice new clean **BLRC** licence to the man behind the desk, I then signed my name and was given my race numbers, one with safety pins to attach to my racing jersey, the other was metal with bits of wire to fix to the bike frame.

I then donned my woollen racing jersey (with number attached) and shorts (a few weeks later I learned what happens to woollen racing gear, when it gets wet) Two ham rolls with surplus bread removed and a hanky were put in the front jersey pockets a peach in one at the back, bananas were yet to arrive on the market.

Then it was the race start, we were lined up and were given a warning talk by the Commissaire, no swearing, fighting or crossing the white line "you will have one warning, this is it"

The church struck eleven and we were off, my first race had started, this is the time when all sorts of thoughts flow through you head, 'is this really a good idea?' 'Have I enough food?' 'Will my Mum be proud of me?' and so on.

The race was de-neutralised at the Town Boundary of Taunton, the lead car accelerated, as did the peloton of 40 riders, I was near the front, but not for very long. I was so mesmerised by the sound of tyres on tarmac and the whirling of gears that I slowly slid backwards through the bunch and out the back. Off the back in the first two miles, I certainly did not expect this, it was not part of the plan, how would I tell my Mum?

The road then turned left at the bottom of the three mile climb, I could not believe the sight before my eyes, it looked like the whole

bunch had fallen, they all seemed to be sitting in the road, so it seems that I was back in the race again, weighing in at only 10 stone, I was beginning to enjoy the climb and latched on to the second group on the road. I assumed that the leaders had avoided the crash, I stayed with this group over the top and managed to hang on down the long and scary decent (I was not so good on the downhill bits) Near the end of the first lap I was handed a sponge (not the eating type) the cold water felt good on my head and neck.

We were soon on the climb again, I stayed with my group over the top, even forcing the pace for some of the way, then it was the downhill bit again, up a short rise, and then, oh! My legs, wow! Did they hurt? The pain was unimaginable, so bad that the group I was with, just rode away from me, then another group of five caught me, I tried to get on the back, my legs would not let me, so they went up the road as well. Fortunately, by this time I was only about five miles from the finish, so with my mentor, Tim Organ screaming at me from his open topped car, I could not make out what he was saying, I am sure that is was not complementary, but it did keep me going.

Well I did not get caught by any other riders, crossing the line on my own in 17th place. Far better than I expected after my early race catastrophe.

There you have it, my first race was over. However, I did learn a lot on that day, Lessons that I always keep in mind. For those of you not sure about racing, have a go, age is not a problem. For the older riders the LVRC and the TLI are good organisations to get you started.