

# STARreview

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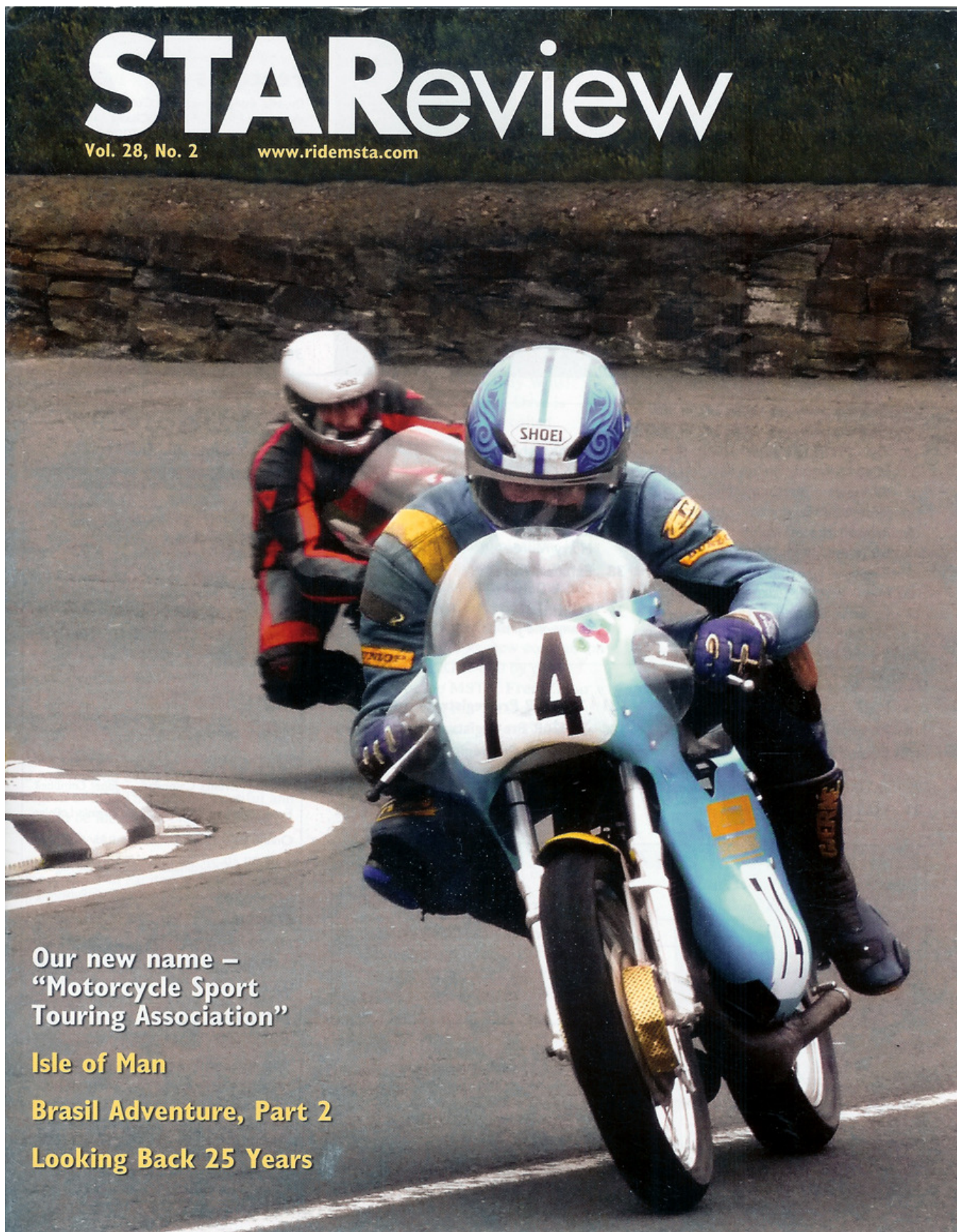
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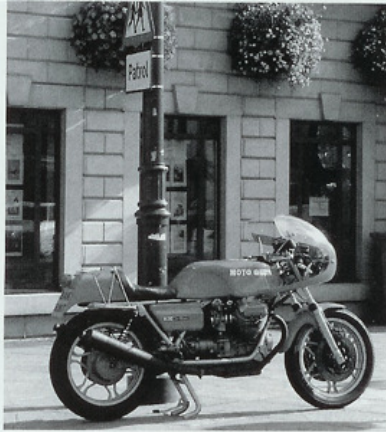
Isle of Man

Brasil Adventure, Part 2

Looking Back 25 Years







# Manx GP

## A Motorcycling Pilgrimage

*By Alan Singer/FL – photos by MotoEuro Garage*

**I**t's drizzling, there's a cold west wind and the fog has finally lifted a few feet above eye level. A glorious green Paton 500cc GP bike wails by, a Norton Manx trumpeting in its wake. This can only be one place on earth, the Isle of Man. We are halfway through our week at the Manx GP and this exact moment at the famous Creg Na Baa turn is why we're here.





There are six of us, **five MSTA Florida members – the Robinsons, Valerie and Bill; the Bolands, Diana and Davie;** and me. Andrew Cleland a friend from the Historic Motorcycle Society rounds out our party.

The Robinsons enjoyed a week of riding VFRs along the England-Scotland border prior to the Manx GP week. They met the Bolands and flew over from Manchester. Andrew spent a soggy week hiking in Cumbria before we met up in Birmingham. There we allotted a couple of hours to visiting the National Motorcycle Museum. Rising from the ashes of a disastrous fire five years ago, the new museum houses a fantastic collection of British bikes. Many obscure brands (does anybody know what a Calthorpe is?), fourteen Brough Superiors and a half dozen Vincents, a dozen or more previously unseen prototypes like the Norton four, and a pit full of race bikes including about half of all the Norton Rotary racers ever built. Six hours later we tore ourselves away catch a train to Liverpool.

### Why Fly when you can Steam?

The classic conveyance to the Isle of Man is the Manx Steam Packet. We wanted the full experience so we booked passage of the ferry despite it costing more than flying over. The Irish Sea was kind, we had a smooth three hour crossing with interesting companions, a veteran Velocette rider and a young Kawasaki race crew member. It was a harbinger of the many pleasant encounters to follow during the next week.

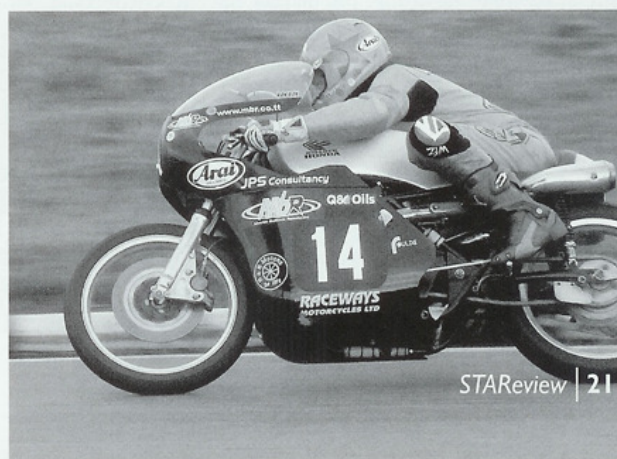
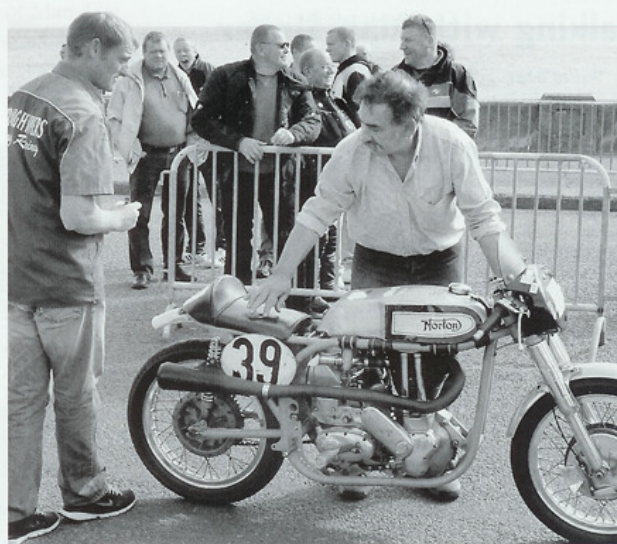
The Manx GP, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, is junior to the more famous, hundred year old TT week, and has evolved into largely a classic bike week. There are three days of racing, several practice sessions, and a sprint (drag racing, but only one bike at a time). The races are held on the same thirty-seven mile mountain course as the TT, three races each for classic and modern equipment. We aimed to get a taste of it all and see a bit of the island as well.

Bill had arranged a house rental in Ramsey and it proved to be an ideal location. There were pubs aplenty, excellent nearby public transit, and the course ran right through Parliament Square just three blocks from our house.

A few hours after arriving, Andrew and I heard the unmistakable sound of British singles at full song. Following the sound we found them in the middle of town, turning hard right by The Swan pub. It's our introduction to Manx racing, standing curbside in front of a chips shop as classic bikes roar by just feet away. Crowd control is minimal, stone walls, curbs, and other hard objects line the course. The surface is reasonably smooth but there are drains and manhole covers just off the racing line, and the roads are cambered for rain runoff. It is almost incomprehensible that John McGuinness has lapped this course averaging 130 mph. He was clocked at 198 mph on a tree-lined lane through the countryside, and it's not straight there!

more ➞

*Opposite, Junior racers at the Gooseneck. Right, from top, Junior race north of Ramsey, Classic Norton Sprinter, Honda 450 at Creg Na Baa.*





☞ Friday morning we hopped on the double-decker bus, great for viewing and photographing the scenic seacoast on the forty-five minute ride down to Douglas. Just outside the town is the start-finish and pit area. An hour later a major goal was accomplished as we boarded the next bus with bags full of Manx race souvenirs.

Saturday being an off day we set off to do the tourist thing. We opted to visit Peel on the western coast. It's the site of two museums, a castle and the island's only cathedral. The day was fine until mid-afternoon when we saw the first of what would be a continuing pattern of wet, windy weather.

### Vintage Gathering in Castletown

Sunday of Manx GP week is always devoted to the Vintage Motorcycle Club's

gathering in Castletown. This gave us the opportunity to check off another planned goal, to ride the restored narrow gauge steam railway. We were able to board in Douglas and take it through lovely verdant country directly to Castletown.

The race we most looked forward to was the Senior Classic. This was the race for 500cc vintage bikes, it would include all the classic British 500 singles, Nortons, BSAs, Velos, etc. as well as continental challengers like MV Agusta and Paton. Scheduled for 10:15 on Monday, the weather caused continual delays, all reported over Manx radio. Then at 2:00 it was announced racing would begin at three. We hopped into a rental car and drove up the mountain to Creg Na Baa.

There in the pub, we joined a hundred or more others waiting for the start. After

a couple more brief delays the race finally started at around 4:00. Due to the late start it was shortened from four to three laps, still over a hundred miles of racing. The format is to start two bikes every 10 seconds with the quickest bikes allotted the lowest numbers and starting first.

The conditions were still iffy on the mountain so the course marshals here hung out the "deterioration of adhesion" flag to warn the riders.

The gorgeous red and silver MV triple led the first lap a few seconds ahead of the Paton but retired with mechanical issues. The Paton, ridden well by Ryan Farquhar, then went on to win over a Manx. Some in the crowd felt the result would have been different had the race gone the full four laps since the Paton would have required a fuel stop. However ifs and buts

## Talking with Alan Singer

By Willie Mac

Just before my home filled up with out of state visitors and a mountain of holiday leftovers. (*Gotta love the holiday season...*) I had the opportunity to talk to Alan Singer about his adventures visiting the Isle of Man, and some other stuff. Two hours after our conversation I received a brief email from him. "*Willie, I need to add one more bit of info: I consider my wife Terri to be the world's greatest pillion. She's always cool and composed, even when dragging bike bits in the Alps.*"

### Touring

That's the kind of guy Alan is: down to earth, easy to talk with and always thinking of the person riding on the rear seat. Alan got into touring about fifteen years ago. In those fifteen years he has ridden in seventeen countries. I'm sure many of us wish we could say that. Eastern Europe is a particular favorite. He finds the history fascinating, the cities exotic and the people really nice. Next year he hopes to visit Sardinia and Corsica. He told me hadn't been into history and cultures for a long time and was now trying to cram it in all at once. I'd say he is doing a pretty good job of it. Check out his website [www.motoeuro.org](http://www.motoeuro.org).

### Photography

In addition to his travels Alan is a photographer, versus a picture taker like me. While not considering himself a pro, his photos have been published in numerous magazines. His tips for taking better photographs: you can never get too close,

especially when shooting a motorcycle or car. Add foreground because it adds scale. And shoot a lot. Digital cameras make this easy. Alan doesn't like darkrooms because of the chemical smell.

### Restoration

Touring and photography can take up all of a person's time. Not Alan's. He also does restoration work on motorcycles. He chuckled when he told me that the ten or eleven bikes in his garage were all 1960s or early 70s models. You can see some of these if you visit his website. I really like his radical 1972 BMW café racer.

### Isle of Man

The reason I contacted Alan was to talk about the Isle of Man. He has so much going on we got sidetracked a bit talking photography and world tours. *Oops!* Anyway, Alan visited the Isle for the Grand Prix, not the TT. His expectations far exceeded anything he had imagined. Everyone was riding fifty year old bikes, and everyone was friendly. I asked him if he would go back. "Yeah!", then said with no hesitation, "It is a whole different environment." It is that environment that he wanted to capture with the accompanying article. "It is kind of like Daytona's Bike Week, but everyone is on a real motorcycle. No one has an attitude." That pretty much sums it up. Thanks, Alan.

[Editor's note: Alan's praise for the world's greatest pillion gave me the thought that there are lots of stories that should be told from the back seat. I would like to hear from all those pillion riders that have humorous or white knuckle stories to tell. Or, maybe some great travel tips learned through your time looking over shoulders. Drop me an email: [tonup@comcast.net](mailto:tonup@comcast.net)]



count little in racing. The second race was for newcomers, first time competitors. A local rider on a GSX-R 600 won it easily.

Tuesday was a day off, a good thing as there was a full Force Five gale blowing. We went to a motorcycle shop and met local John Matthews.

When he heard we were planning to next go to see the A.R.E. motorcycle collection (Editor's Note: British

*Manufactured machines from the 1920's to the late 1960's, including the best collection of Triumphs in private ownership in the British Isles; all meticulously restored.*), he invited us to join him and his friends for lunch at his 500-year-old seaside cottage.

Following lunch we drove up a very foggy, wet, windy Snaefell Mountain. Here there was another goal to be achieved. At the very top is the Joey Memorial, a bronze statue of the late Joey Dunlop, generally considered the greatest rider in the history of Manx racing.

The collection of over seventy-five motorcycles was nicely presented and well worth the visit. The pair of HRDs parked in the lot was a nice addition. Walking up the lane to the cottage we were struck by the beauty of the place. John warmly invited us in and plied us with meat pies, smoked trout and beer. There were probably another eight or so guests, just about all ex-racers and/or collectors. These fellows had stories!

Our last full day on the island would be Wednesday. Blessed by the "worst weather in Manx GP history" (of course), the races were again delayed into the afternoon. Finally the word came out that the Junior Classic (vintage bikes under 350cc) would start at 3:00 to be followed by the 600cc modern's race. Andrew and I hurried to the Gooseneck, another well-known mountain section. We wormed our way into the front rank of spectators where three blokes from Stoke-on-Trent welcomed us onto their little space atop a small berm. As long-term attendees they

**The conditions were still iffy on the mountain so the course marshals here hung out the "deterioration of adhesion" flag to warn the riders.**

New Imperial single to a turbo stretched Hayabusa. In between were many examples of the unique British style of ingenuity great counterpoints to all the thoroughbreds we'd seen during the week.

And then it was over, one of the best trips I've ever had. As my friend Andrew said, you just have to experience it to understand. The Isle of Man, like Daytona, is one of those things that a motorcycle enthusiast just has to do. 🏍️

knew many of the participants and shared lots of tales. Too soon we had to leave as we had reservations for a farewell dinner.

Thursday was departure day, but since the ferry didn't depart Douglas until 3:00, we had all morning to check out the sprints. Handily, the course was laid out on the promenade just a five-minute walk from our house. Entries ranged from a completely standard 1920's



Bill, Davie and Andrew

## Call of the Wild

*An African Motorcycle Safari*



*April and September, 2009*

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