

## **More adventures with the Norton Electra**

After the trip to Millau it was time to take stock and get the bike running better. Rolling along happily all day at 55mph is fine, but better things are possible if the clutch will grip above half throttle and the apparent rich running can be cured. Over winter 2014 the clutch plates are removed and cleaned in petrol, clutch springs adjusted again, tappets checked, ignition timing checked, main jet renewed, float swapped for the latest ethanol proof version and points examined microscopically for signs of malfunction.

Summer 2015 came with a slightly better clutch grip. The emphasis being on slightly. Overtaking an articulated lorry by winding on full throttle leaves you alongside the trailer, on the wrong side of the road, with engine revving and bike slowing. Not good for riders of a nervous disposition, especially if the car behind is tucked up your rear mudguard and intent on passing the same lorry.

The rich running was due to a faulty coil. The incomplete combustion gave all the symptoms of rich running. Rough engine, dark plugs and sooty exhaust. By now I'm getting fed up with the performance of 'new' coils.

By reading the Amal book on carb tuning we learn how important the main jet is. It must be the correct size and it must be checked by holding the bike at full throttle and doing a plug chop. Not possible on this Electra so I keep the carb to factory settings.

Chairman Barrie buys an Electra and I get a chance to ride his. I'm impressed at the sharpness and smooth running of his Boyer equipped engine. My darling wife agrees to buy me a Pazon electronic ignition, with two 6 volt coils, for my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday in October. The order goes to New Zealand.

Another winter comes and the steering head bearings are replaced. Out comes the auto advance mechanism with its sticky springs and weights. Out come the two dodgy condensers, the points and those troublesome 'new' 12 volt coils. All this dodgy stuff replaced by the Pazon system, although I'm a bit suspicious of the new 6 volt coils, branded Lucas, which come with the kit and look suspiciously like my 12 volt coils. All doubts fall away when I see Pazon have kindly added a chocolate bar to the kit.

I make a special clutch centre nut incorporating a clutch pushrod seal just in case gearbox oil is contaminating my plates. I renew the clutch shock absorber rubbers which are disintegrating and fouling the clutch with rubbery, oily, goo. I decide to try new clutch friction plates, rather than again digging into my pile of fifty year old used stock, and get three Surfex items from RGM.

The Norton lightweight clutch has a peculiar stepped plain clutch plate that doesn't seem to add much to the party. This comes out and one of my handpicked 50 year old friction plates and a plain plate goes in its place. Now I've a four plate clutch instead of the standard three plate. The pack is deeper, but not so much that the last plate falls out of the clutch basket. I

find an alloy pressure plate of reduced height (from an early Dommie?) and pushrod geometry is restored.

This year the Electra led a bold band of branch members on a tour of the North Yorks Moors. Our run on the lesser highways included roundabouts, steep ascents, even steeper descents, gorgeous views, sheep on the road, wartime music, blanketing fog and torrential rain. For the tough ones who made it to the end, there was steam and smoke at Grosmont.

I find myself with a week spare in mid August and embark on another adventure with the Electra. A three legged journey that will take me to Cornwall, Newark and then home.

Perhaps I should tell another story first. On arriving back from holiday in France late on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August I decide to leave early Sunday on the Electra to have a coffee with the NOC members at Kendal. It's the last day of the National Rally 2016 and they will be packing up. Only ten minutes into the journey I pass a new GS1100 with distressed rider on the opposite side of the road. No petrol. Distressed rider hops onto the back of the Electra, wondering if it will crumble under him, and we tour petrol stations in Skipton trying to buy a can of petrol. Plenty of petrol, but none of the kiosks are open at 7.15am to sell a can. Using an old pop bottle, I give him 2 litres from my tank and then promptly run out about 30 miles further up the road to Kendal. My dear wife, on hearing the sob story, comes out with a can from home and encourages me to complete the journey. There's a moral here. And I'm not sure what it is.

Back to the three legged journey. With a forecast of rain I pack the panniers and set out on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August for Birmingham. The drizzle thankfully disappears as I climb the steep A56 towards Rawtenstall, engine chiming and clutch behaving, where I pick up the M66 for Manchester. The motorways are a bit dull at 58 mph but with gridlock for miles at Worsley and masses of 50 mph roadwork speed limit, even 58 mph was ambitious. Dropping off the M6 at Junction 16 I pick up the A500/A51 through Newcastle-U-Lyme, Stone, Rugeley, Lichfield, and join the A38 south to Birmingham. The A38 melts into the Aston expressway and then carves through Birmingham centre in a series of tunnels. By 5.00pm I am at my brother Alan's house in Moseley. The bike is wheeled into the warm garage to join Alan's GS1100 BMW and left untouched while I join him and wife Kathryn for a great weekend. On Monday morning I'm having breakfast with a French couple who are motoring to Exeter, via an excursion to Bath. I should perhaps explain that Alan and Kathryn host on the AirB&B system and you meet all sorts of nice people at breakfast. I jokingly tell Mathieu I'm also going to Exeter, and I'll follow him down the motorway.

I leave Alan at 9.15am and I'm back at his house at 9.15 and 40 seconds. In those 40 seconds I've wobbled twenty yards down the road, decided it's a puncture, and wobbled back. The electric garage door bounces open again. A front puncture is confirmed. We have a few problems when I try to use my twenty year old rubber solution in the repair kit, but Alan comes up with some fresher stuff and a repair is made. I'm ready to go by 11.00am. (note to self – That spare 18ins tube in your luggage, covered in rust flakes that are embedded into the rubber, that you took out of a derelict rear wheel in 2007, and put into the Michelin carton that had a new tube, is next to useless. Especially when the front wheel is 19 ins.)

Alan takes a video of me leaving, complete with sound, and sends it my mother in Liskeard with a note that I'll probably arrive at 8.00pm, rather than 6.00pm as planned. The sun shines brightly as I join the traffic crawl through Kings Heath to the M42 and then the M5 south. This section of M5 is all 50mph for central reservation upgrades. I leave the M5 at Junction 7 and take the scenic A449 through Malvern, over the Malvern Hills, to Ledbury. Even see 65mph on the speedo when overtaking a car on the A449. Tut Tut, but things are going well. Ross, Monmouth, and then a stop at the 'Old Station Café' in Tintern. This café is a favourite of mine, and a real gem. Signposted, set off the road, clean, home cooked, inside and outdoor seating, and with lovely views. They even have a preserved railway coach on some track. On returning to the bike there a two elderly gentlemen poring over it, with their wives standing patiently behind. They have completely forgotten about their intended tour of the railway carriage as they regale me with stories of bikes owned in their younger days. I'm quizzed about the Electra and both wives look as though they are used to this sort of thing. They stay to hear it fired up, nostalgia races through their veins, and I'm heading south once more.

I cross the Severn estuary at Chepstow on the older bridge. Straight after the bridge I duck off the motorway to take the A-road to Avonmouth, 9 miles away, and rejoin the M5 there. It all comes to nothing after the road is blocked near Avonmouth and diversion signs take me back to Patchway. Remember that childhood game? 'Snakes and Ladders'.

Sticking to the motorway at that sonorous resonance of 58 to 60 mph I recall my brother telling me how all modern trucks are governed to a maximum speed of 59 MPH. How come they are all passing me then? Another of life's mysteries. I make an excursion through Burnham-on-sea and Highbridge. Ten miles short of Exeter a French registered car drives alongside, window down, thumb sticking out. It's Mathieu and his wife on the way to their friends in Exeter. Hope they enjoyed Bath. What a lovely day.

On the A38 after Exeter it's obvious all the tourists have also had a lovely day. Mixed in with the afternoon commuting traffic this cocktail comes unstuck with a four car collision. Overhead signs warn of a 45 minute hold-ups on the dual carriageway. Once everything is stopped I trickle up the centre of the two lanes in second gear at low revs. Most car windows are open and the drivers let you by. I try to be courteous and smile as I pass all those heavy goods vehicles that hauled past me on the M5. More gridlock just after Plymouth. At 7.45pm I arrive at Mum's house in Liskeard, very glad to get there. I put a cover over the bike for the next couple of days.

On Wednesday I clean the bike and on Thursday ride the 40 miles up to Bude where I have a meeting with Frank Westworth, a motorcycling journalist and past editor of Roadholder. I spend a couple of hours with Frank and then pass the afternoon in Bude before riding back to Liskeard. It was pleasing that the starter motor did the business under the critical gaze of Frank and Rowena.

I visit friend Roy at Landrake on Friday to see the latest addition to his stable. Roy used to have a new Triumph Bonneville. A good looking machine, with electric foot, but quite a tall saddle and heavy. This has gone and in it's place a 1948 Douglas 350 flat twin. The 3TA bathtub and the TRW sidevalve also adorn the shed and both still ready to run. I park in front

of his garage where Roy has a bench seat. He calls this his admiration bench, and we spend time there, chatting and admiring the Electra.

The Douglas has been well cared for but Roy has some rear brake issues. The cable operated brake will occasionally jam on. Also the home made prop stand, by previous owner, fouls the brake pedal. Small problems for Roy, who is well qualified in the 'fixing' department.

On the return from Roy's to Liskeard, only 12 miles, the engine momentarily seemed to cut out. Hmmmm. Also, was it running a little rougher?

Next day, Saturday, and exactly a week after leaving home in Yorkshire, I set off for Newark. I knew it was a long way, so get away, fully fuelled, at 9.15am. Rather than pounding back to Plymouth and Exeter on the A38. I choose Tavistock and then the A386 over the north west of Dartmoor, a fabulous road, to Oakhampton. All signs try to put you on the A30, but with care am able to find a B-road on the line of the Dartmoor steam railway that eventually takes me through Crediton to Tiverton and then onto the dreaded M5.

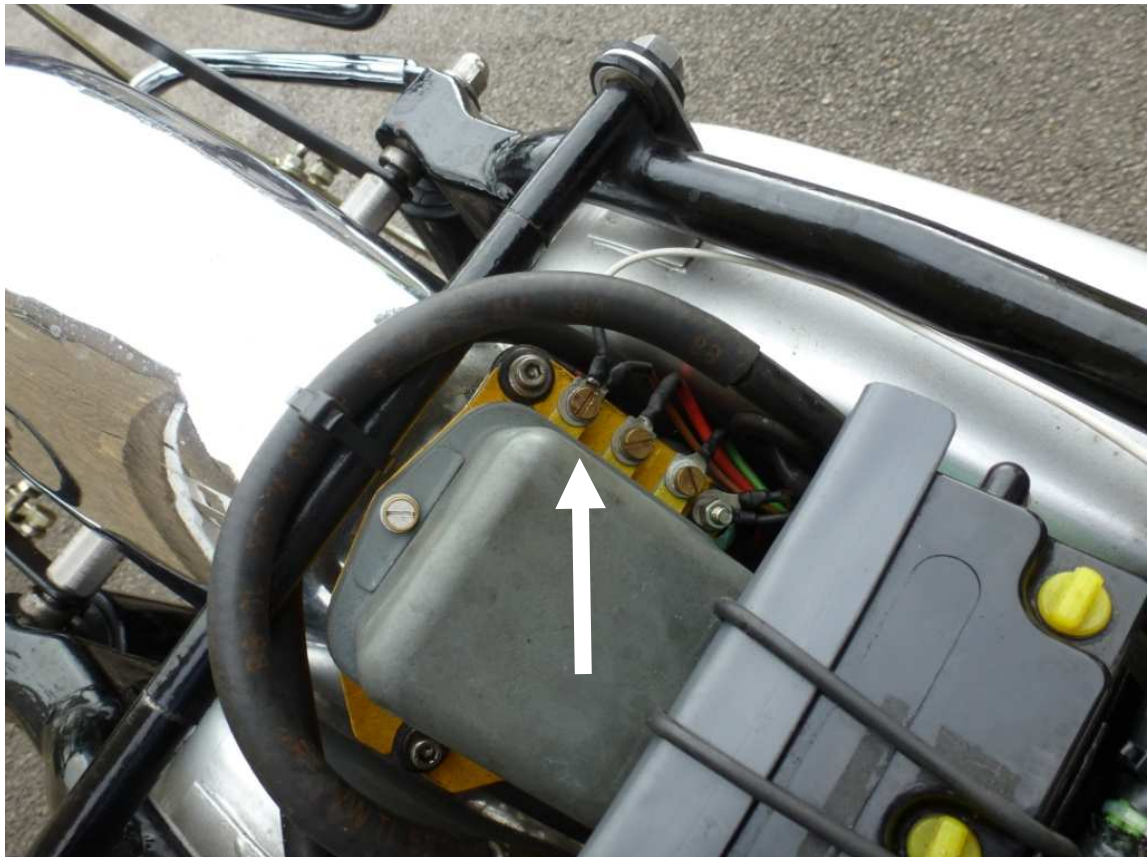
The weather is still fair, with the forecast storms blowing eastward and ahead of me.

On the M5 the traffic is dense. Very dense. The whole world must end their holiday in the West Country on a Saturday. Another occasion where the Electra is happy at motorway speed. Occasionally, everything comes to a halt and I filter onward. Often, just one car with a puncture or a breakdown is enough to stop flow. The misfire returns spasmodically. I try easing the petrol cap off without result. Wonder about the full tank of Morrison's petrol. Press on, round Bristol and up the M5 to stop at Michaelwood Services for coffee and petrol.

I park on some grass so I can off-load the panniers, seat and tank without picking up any paint chips. Check all the wires to and from the coils. Nothing loose. If it's one of these 6 volt coils going duff, then I'm stuffed. Being in series, one open circuit coil brings the whole show down. I notice one of the pannier lower mounts is making a break for freedom and re-tighten the nuts. Then I restore the bike and have my coffee.

Still misfiring occasionally, press on past Gloucester and leave the M5 at Tewkesbury, heading east. Things look very black ahead. On the A46 to Evesham the heavens open, the rain bounces and lightning flashes. Cars are reduced to 30mph and take great care to skirt the floodwaters. I take even more care to skirt the floodwaters, but sometimes they are across the road and into my boots. The horn takes on a life of it's own, getting more and more enthusiastic. I stop, and with great difficulty remove my right hand super soft mushy leather glove. Then burn the back of my middle finger on the engine or the exhaust while trying to remove the live tag from the horn. No worries, when eventually I force my hand back into the glove, the burn has all the cold water treatment it needs. The dual carriageway A46 between Warwick and Coventry comes to a rain sodden halt. When I eventually make it to the front it is to see the left hand carriageway too deep to pass, and all traffic crawling through the shallower right lane. A bit more misfiring, more floods and I'm at the roundabout joining the Coventry ring road. Then it happened.

Right on the three lane roundabout a misfire that didn't recover. I'm broken down with a bike that won't restart on a tiny bit of crosshatching at the side of a busy 3 lane roundabout. And it's raining. Recovery seems a good solution. In desperation I decide to have one more investigation. Left hand pannier off and tool roll extracted. Remove contact breaker cover and tug the wires to pick-up board. Both tight and no visible damage to rotor or PCB. Replace contact breaker cover and remove seat.



Check tag on white wire which takes 12 volts to Pazon system. Wire is secure and the screw, which is on the 12 volt terminal of the ancient Wipac voltage regulator, is tight. Loosen brass screw, waggle the two BZP tags underneath, re-tighten screw. Put seat on and try kicking the engine and after a cough on first kick, she starts on the second. Hooray!!

Pannier back on which is a real struggle so close to the Armco. Force hands into glove mush and forward progress is resumed. Now only two roundabouts and five miles before the M69. Just after the first roundabout I start wondering. "Did I tighten the two seat retaining nuts?" My left hand reaches down and behind. The nut is still there but ominously it seems to rotate. I'm still thinking and I might lose the nut, the bolt might drift inwards, the bolt head might start tearing into the sidewall, and all would be a disaster. No more thinking.

Pull off the A46 at the next roundabout, curse myself, curse my sodden gloves, curse the weather and tighten the wretched nuts. This A46 goes all the way to Newark, but I need petrol before then. Leicester Forest East on the M1 will have upper class petrol and is the logical

choice. Spirits are low and I can't decide if it's better to keep my helmet on while having a pee, or try tucking it under arm, or putting it down on the 'wet' floor. Such is life. It's half past six and I telephone my uncle Chris at Newark with an ETA. The rest of the family have eaten, but the buffet is still on the table. Chris moved from London to Newark a year ago and has no idea where Leicester Forest East services are. One of the GPS generation.

The rain lifts and the sun starts to set behind me as I roar along the last 40 miles of A46 to Newark. When I get to Chris' house, a big warm welcome, dry garage, loads of food, hot shower and a few glasses of wine. The boots and gloves will still be sodden next afternoon when I leave. Will I ever forget that 305 mile journey from Liskeard to Newark?

Chris and Pam wave me off at 5.00pm on Sunday, after a very extended Sunday lunch at the pub. Dry weather and those wet gloves come with me up the A1 to Ferrybridge for a fuel stop. Then, onwards with a steady beat, past Leeds to Wetherby, Otley and finally home just as darkness falls. The gloves are wrenched off for the last time and the Electra tucked up in the garage. A hug from my ever tolerant wife.

People tell me it's easy to keep in touch with friends and family through Facebook but it wouldn't be the same, would it!

Peter Holland

4<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016