

"Bill . . . airily announced that he had decided . . . to take up racing . . . His father was the first to recover . . ."

WE would become "racers"—leather clad, grim faced, iron-nerved men, whose very souls wallowed in castor oil. We would purchase a lithe racing job possessed of a fabulous performance and disport ourselves at the venues of Speed, fully equipped with daring abandon. Our minds were made up.

A couple of visits to a distant path-racing circuit had fired our eager souls with an enthusiasm which resulted in bedroom walls becoming beautifully plastered with cut-out pictures of "90" Beams, T.T. Ridges and "cammy Ajays"—all featured cornering at decidedly impressive and perilous angles. Long-suffering parents bemoaned the fact that our education had resulted in "one-track minds," for we existed in a world governed by such idols as C. J. P. Dodson, Tim Hunt, "The Rudge Trio," Freddie Hicks, Wal Handley and Stanley Woods. Our local village "lads" included Tommy Spann, the Merrill brothers, and another good half-dozen Amateur T.T. stars.

That was in 1930. We were young, but youth is rarely bounded by the cares and often purely imaginary considerations which beset old men of 21 and upwards. Thus when Bill and I decided to become "racers" we could see no real difficulties in the project.

The second-hand columns of "Motor Cycling" were undergoing their usual searching examination when we came to this:—"1928 350 Blackburne-engined racing job—stripped and ready to perform—box of spares incl. various pistons. Terrific performance—only needs seeing—suit novice. £40 complete."

We had decided upon a strategic approach to the personal problems confronting us—thus it came to pass that one evening we entered the drawing-room at Bill's home with the solemn air of an important deputation.

Bill, with an assumed nonchalance worthy of greater occasions, chose his moment carefully, then airily announced that he had decided, after due consideration, of course, to take up racing in the competitive sense. I thought he did it very well indeed—the detached air of careless interest was just right.

His father was the first to recover; but the expression on his face as it appeared over the top of the Sunday news sheet boded a heap of difficulties for friend Bill.

"You're going to *WHAT?*" he hissed.

The atmosphere was tense—I looked around vainly for a convenient hole approximately 2 ft. wide by 5 ft. 4 ins. deep. His mother had gone pale and her lips moved in what I assumed would be silent prayer. His sister had given up an unequal struggle with a radio which point blank refused to produce Sunday night dance music.

Bill, seemingly unruffled by this indifferent reception to his Great Decision, explained himself in greater detail and with some deliberation. A splendid effort, which I mentally applauded.

Then the storm broke! For a profound twenty minutes I listened to an extremely one-sided discussion on the subject of high speed and blood baths. Bill Senior rose to hitherto unsuspected heights of oratory—mainly damning condemnation of ultra-rapid progress from Point A to Point B—both the hypothetical A and B being one and the same place. Glencrutchery Road was cited as an example of this form of progress. "Racing? Bah! Bone-headed dumb-bells, both of you!"

That, in one sentence, succinctly summed up the Old Man's view of the proposition. Nor was I left in any

"A-Racing We



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doubt as to where I stood in the family estimation—my own reception had been less acidulated but quite as definite.

Despite the tornado of words, we remained unshaken by the blast. "A-racing we would go," come what may. We held a council of war, at which we agreed to pool our finances, a total of £35. We also decided that our "racer" must occupy a neutral lock-up, whilst we would adopt assumed names. *Nil desperandum* and all that!

No further time was lost in contacting the advertiser of the Blackburne-powered "plot," and a day or two later it stood revealed before our worshipping gaze. "Stark simplicity" and "sleek lines" were phrases unworthy of that projectile—it promised urgency in every drilled detail. Its owner must have possessed limitless patience and a positive battery of well-sharpened bits. The engine plates, for example, strongly resembled a honeycomb radiator. Its tank carried a "New Henley" transfer; the forks were a lovely set by Webb; the brakes were Harwil products, and the gearbox a Burman.

After a little haggling—which extended almost to closing time—we acquired the bike, with spares, for £37 plus four pints of bitter (pre-war, remember!), and it was towed to its new home behind my 1925 350 Rudge.

For the next few weeks the whole of our spare time was spent in the "lock-up," and when we *did* emerge into the outside world we were extremely preoccupied

looks. Bill's mother put this fact down to silent grief, whilst his father, with a less sentimental outlook, advised a course of syrup of figs. We scorned their false sympathy.

It must be confessed, however, that our continual interest in "the racer" was not calculated to improve its potency. We replaced shabby insulating tape and copper wire with monotonous regularity and—shame on our ignorance—we even discarded it completely if we didn't think it *looked* good. How were *we* to know that, in the course of one racing day, almost every darn nut can work loose; that control levers vibrate and disappear under the bars; that mudguard stay bolts shed themselves almost without warning; that brake anchorage split pins matter more than a polished exhaust?

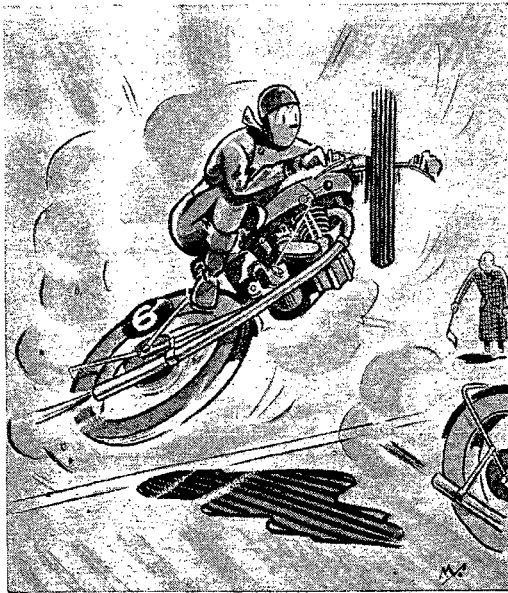
Yes, we had much to learn besides a keen appreciation

Would Go''

An Amusing Story of Two Novices With a Common Ambition

of a high polish and a reverberating exhaust note, for we were very fond of tweaking that quick-acting twistrip to the accompaniment of sundry bellows, snarls and subdued mutterings from a large-bore straight-through pipe.

In between times we would linger around the local establishment of Tommy Spann and gaze jealously at camshaft



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A.J.S. "specials" in the hope of spying out hints and tips. We suffered from a self-inflicted air of superiority and hoped that it wouldn't be long before motor-cycling journalists sought *our* opinions!

This phase didn't last for very long, however; our entries had been accepted for a local grass-track meeting, and we were about to absorb much knowledge in the painful manner. We had entered—under false names, of course—for four events, and Bill was to ride in the first and third races as his share of the Great Enlightenment.

Amidst admiring looks from the race-going crowds we reached the arena. My confidence had begun to ebb a little by this time, but Bill looked as if a size 8 hat would leave a groove in his skull.

We parked ourselves in the competitors' enclosure, a busy little fenced-off square which reeked of sickly sweet castor oil and hot engines. As I bent to unhitch the tow rope a blast of hot air mingled with a confusion of burnt "R" smote me with a violent concussion of noise which threatened to burst my ear drums. This maestro of thunder and smell proved to be the simple process of "warming up" a distinctly tuneful Ulster Rudge parked in a neighbouring square. Its owner grinned at my shocked surprise and apologized—then he looked us over more seriously. "Your first race, boys?" he inquired. He grinned again when we nodded, and five minutes later he was initiating us into the dark secrets of "hard" and "soft" plugs, finishing up by vetting our engine and making us a gift of a real genuine hard racing "candle."

By MARKHAM

(Illustrated by the Author)

He waved away our thanks, and two rather humble novices stood looking at one another—strangers in a little world where men used a quaint vocabulary and gave their help unselfishly to all and sundry. Bill pulled on his gloves—rather nervously I thought—and we pushed the bike out as a megaphoned voice called our number.

Back in the enclosure I watched anxiously. A sudden crescendo of exhausts split the air and five machines hurried towards the first bend, jockeying for position, bellowing exhausts drowning the cheers and entreaties of their various supporters. But back in the vicinity of the starting line were Bill and our "racer" engaged in a frenzied wrestling match, with the front wheel pawing madly at thin air.

Poor Bill! In the confusion and excitement of the getaway he had whipped up the revs, to near peak and then let the clutch in with a grand flourish. The resultant unleashing of approximately 18 very effective horses had done the rest, and after some amazing gyrations performed solely on the rear wheel, he sat down—hard! The crowd rocked, whilst Bill and "the menace" were quickly cleared from the scene of their unintentional rodeo act.

Ere long I took my place by the starter, nervous and quaking with suppressed excitement. The flag dropped—and before I had released the clutch lever I was twenty yards behind. (Lesson 1: practise the getaway.) The Blackburne was pushing out knots quicker than I could cope with 'em and I shot into the first bend miles too fast, but having made up some ten of my lost yards; then I promptly lost ground again trying to recover on the bend itself. (Lesson 2: never enter a bend above the speed you can take it.) I was learning all right!

By the third lap I was feeling dazed but had obtained third position. Then on the final lap I finished my lessons for that particular race. The second bend was coming up rapidly—very rapidly—and I reached out for the front brake... *but the lever wasn't there!*

The resultant panic wasn't so bad that I couldn't remember to change down, and I grabbed feverishly at the hand gear change lever, shooting round the bend with not a solitary inch to spare, whilst the rest of the field tore past on the inside with a defiant roar, leaving me to drift home last. The front brake lever? Oh, yes; it was *underneath* the bar, and I breathed curses on our folly in cleaning up the adhesive tape which had previously secured it in a position where it was meant to stay.

Our remaining performances were very mediocre, and two saddened members of the novice class wandered home that night ruminating deeply. If anything, our enthusiasm went deeper than ever, but we agreed that experience is a great teacher. Later, we were to find that the sharp agony which the novice feels when he makes an exhibition of himself has its good points—those initial lessons were so graven on our minds that we never forgot them.

The sportsmanship of our fellow competitors was something worth experiencing, too; the helping hand was always proffered even when we had graduated to the Expert Class—and we didn't reach *that* dizzy height very quickly!

Quite recently I bumped into Bill Senior. "Come and have a drink," he invited. "I want to tell you about my lad. He's just been awarded the D.F.C. I always said he had it in him..."