

# The Voyager

## Long-Term:

But what" asked the Editor, "is it like to live with?... You know, tyre life, petrol consumption etc." Not a foolish question, when considering a mode of transport. Not necessarily a relevant question, in modern bike-buying trends. Are modern bikes 'modes of transport' first and foremost? Put it another way. If the Voyager had handled like silk, gone like a rocket, returned 100 mpg at 100 mph. and done 20,000 miles per tyre, but still looked alien, would it have been in great demand?

Back to the question. Voyager owners are, by default, a rare breed. In fact, there are just five of us. First, however, you must understand that prototypes are not built with the same philosophy as Fireblades or Triumph triples. There is still development work to be done, and much enjoyment to be had from this, and this defined the

philosophy of we first (and probably last) five Voyager customers. Mere statistics do not therefore do justice to the phenomenon of Voyager, and I will not therefore answer the editor's question directly in a string of boring statistics.

### GOING PLACES

You go places and do things with a Voyager. Not least because of the huge boot, which means you can carry more than just a posing pouch within the design lines. I've been all over Europe in mine, without a pannier or backpack in sight. On the other hand, they have small fuel tanks (about 12 litres), due to being built just the wrong side of the outdated plastic fuel tank law - they could have got a much larger plastic one in the space available between the frame. Hence the petrol cans and auxiliary fuel tank in

some Voyager boots.

Voyagers are partial to overheating and cooling fluid loss. This is caused partly by simple expansion and partly by a complex change in the aerodynamics at around 80 to 100 mph. This results in the temperature indicator 'reading' the cruising speed. That is, 80 degrees at 80 mph; 90 at 90; 100 at 100. We are working on this one - as witnessed by 04's boot contents. Anyone have access to a wind tunnel to help with the air-flow problems?

Carburettors are a constant source of discussion with tuners of Reliant engines. (Ask the F750 boys). Not having space for a 3 ft inlet manifold a la F750, the best we have so far is a downdraught Weber [32 or 34 ICH]. 01 and 05 are suitably equipped, and Colin and I swear by them (now: although at the time the boot sample was taken, he had



*Not just for shopping...this is Voyager 02 in the Gavia Pass in Italy (in a thunderstorm)*



the old one along just in case!); bin the original SU has given 02 some remarkable consumption figures, Jim quoted nearly 80 mpg on a recent admittedly steady tour of Ireland. If you thrash it, obviously consumption suffers, as you cannot accelerate 680 lbs of motorcycle for free. But once up to speed and cruising, the Voyagers remarkable aerodynamics ensure decent consumption figures.

All owners, being mature individuals, arc coy when it comes to the "What'll it do Mister?" question. All have seen well over three figures on the clock, but only 05 exceeds this regularly. This a largely down in 05's taller 'Le Mans' gearing which means that 100 mph comes up on the instruments at around 80 mph! All agree that on UK

roads, talk of speeds well into three figures is academic; but 05 pilots agree the lower gearing dots make life more exciting while getting there, even if it cuts the top speed from 3 theoretical 140 to an attainable 115. Experience has shown that this is one charge well worth doing, because if the standard low powered, high geared, high weight Voyager has a fault, it is less than nippy acceleration. The one exception to the speedometer comments is Keith Duckworth on Voyager 03, the speed of which significantly under-reads, and who recounts 'passing everything' on the M1 at a steady indicated 80 mph (and I think he means other vehicles, rather than any intestinal malfunctions). Perhaps he and I should swap speedos.

Mileages to date are mixed. 01 was a late developer, and has only 2000 miles on the clock. It does however look stunning in Red



*Colin Russells' Voyager 02 in Red Arrows Red - he comes mot in the boor than you're ever Ateh! in your panniers*

Arrows red - as seen at Bristol. Colin hops to get more miles under his wheels this summer. 02 is well toured, and Jim has been round mainland Europe, Scandinavia and Ireland: putting 15,000 miles on the clock, it was factory-painted red, a slightly deeper shade than 01. Keith's 03 was in police trim at purchase, but the transfers have been peeled off to leave it all white and legal. It has only 2,000 miles on the clock, partly courtesy of PNB, and partly because Keith has many other bikes on which to experiment. 04 has 7,500 miles on it, and gets regular usage from Derbyshire GP David. It is the display model from 1989 NEC Show, but is not quite as pretty as 01 now. It does however sport a red head-piece cowling to liven up the livery. My Voyager 05 is the most used at 30,000 miles, although half of those were done by the press, and it has had a cosmetic rebuild. Well wouldn't you after all those pressing bottoms?

## BEST & WORST

All owners are clear why they bought them, and what the good comes ire. There are lots of good engineering reasons why FFs superior. Just look at the aerodynamics of your average bike - Very slick, but stick a normal rider on it, and either/s/he has to emulate a monkey or ruins the lines. The rider is also a proportion of the total weight, and sticking all that weight so high up does alarming things to the whole caboodle's centre of gravity. Not to mention weather protection/luggage capacity/crash protection—sorry to go on. Well, the Famous Five were sufficiently convinced to try out the FF alternative, and none of us are selling yet, even with Reliant engines and Guzzi gearboxes.

What do we like best? "Fast A-roads, comfort and the stability at speed" was the unanimous reply. Not motorways? "OK for getting places fast, but not for real enjoyment." Now doesn't that prove we are motorcyclists at heart? Keith Duckworth is complimentary about the effort that went into the design of the Voyager, and he is in fact the one person we should listen to in the automotive innovation area, as he has been there and done it (Duckworth as in



Cosworth). He thinks it works remarkably well in handling and general drivability, but is however fairly sceptical about the ultimate potential of the components, and for that reason has not tried to significantly improve his.

What about the worst aspects? "The weight and the heal when maneuvering in traffic, particularly with the high gearing." (With the Le Mans gearing, 05 is now in fact quite nice town tool). Designer Royce Creasey agrees that all prototypes were way over design weight, and blames it on overdone bodywork (not to mention the boot contents) but admits that each component would need looking at to see where reduction could be achieved. The weight encourages tyre wear, and tyres do not last much beyond 4,000 to 5,000 miles. Alas, this seems one area where bikes will never be as long lasting as cars. (My Enfields rear lasted 20,000, but maybe that's a special case - Ed.)

05 seems to have been the only one not stopped by curious coppers. At least not with me on board. Not that 01 to 04 were doing anything wrong you understand; just the ever present W.O.E.I.T.? syndrome. We do like to convert the heathen, but all have lost track of the frequency the standard summary has been trotted out:

"...It's a Voyager...Reliant engine...Guzzi gearbox and driv...Royce Creasey...Little Welsh company - SCL.No they only made five-yes it's a pity...Yes it's very comfy.theoretically 140 mph...no, crosswinds are no problem...weight is all low down you see...Passenger?...yes you can...see the seat slides back...those are the passenger's footrests...rather a gynaecological position really...."

Now has all this answered the Editor's question? Probably not, but it does give me the excuse for an update in a year's time. GR

## BOOT QUESTIONS

Unlike any conventional bike, the Voyager has a boot, and just like car boots, it becomes a repository for sundry items to be carried everywhere the bike happens to be. The riddle is: "What have they got in their boot?" This is intended, not as a parody of The Hobbit's conversation with Gollum, but rather a glimpse of reality behind the hype. A quick snapshot at the Bristol Classic show revealed the following items in Colin Russell's Voyager 01: Antifreeze (2 litres); Belstaff Trousers; Camera; Carburettor (SU) complete with manifold; Conning tower (upper part of Voyager steering head); Helmet; Gloves; Lock (U-type); Mug (awarded to exhibitors at show); Full overnight bag; Petrol (1 gal); Plastic bag of rags (dirty); Trainers (smelly); Turtle wax (shine for the application of); Tool kit (extensive).

Dr David Howarth's more used Voyager 04 revealed a similar catalogue of horrors, with the addition of a large heat-exchanger linked to the cooling system... Jim Moyland's 02 adds an auxiliary fuel tank in the boot and my own 05 has a similar collection of bits, plus a 2 litre beer bottle (sadly filled with antifreeze) and an RBR gold award (see MCS&L, January). Keith Duckworth has carpeted the boot of 03 to stop things rattling around.



05 with its clothes on - you can see where 'The Fridge' nickname came from



Voyager's high tail is the cause of all that boot space. Would Dr meng (see page 1068) have been interested?

05 after its rebuild, but before the bodywork was replaced

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Few people have had more riding experience of the Voyager than Paul Blezard. Here he recaps on the saga of the Voyager and its makers.

Royce Creasey built his first complete FF in 1985, powered by a Ducati 450 single in a chassis of his own design. It was steered by a Difazio unit and used a Volvo car seat - I called it the 'High Techati' after Creasey's company High Tech. The handling was impressive, but the big-end went bang after 9,000 miles and Creasey decided to start again, using the same Reliant 850 engine used by the Ousar, but this time with a 5-speed Guzzi gearbox.

By 1988 the first Voyager prototype was up and running. It used the complete front end off the High Techati as well as unique aircraft-style hand controls. Later that year Creasey and his wife Ingrid Oesten linked up with three other partners and a computer-based company called SCL, based in Crickhowell, Powys. Plans were drawn up to put the Voyager into production and the new machine was unveiled at the NEC Bike Show

in December 1989 by Lord 'Rolla' Denbeigh.

Over the next few months, the Voyager demonstrator (05) was tested by a lot of journalists and featured in a host of car and bike publications - motocross champion Vic Allan tested it for the BBC's Top Gear. Reviews were mixed, but the truth is that the demo Voyer was pretty un-user friendly. It weighed far more than its claimed 530lb and had a lot less power than the claimed 60bhp. It was also test-ridden by over 200 potential buyers, three of whom put down deposits. I first rode the bike in December, and preferred not to reveal my opinions in the press. But I did write a confidential report for SCL. Unfortunately, they were already in severe financial difficulty, and could not afford to give the bike the development it sorely needed.

A year later with the help of the late Dave Taylor, I set up a link between SCL and Norton, but Norton's chief tester was unimpressed after a test ride, so the proposed link-up never materialised. I went on riding it though - another 1,000 miles in December 1990, and a trip to the Munich HQ of the

TUV. On the way back (calling at Ecomobile in Switzerland and Boccardo in France) I was stopped and fined by the French police for having a bald tyre - (GR please note!)

By this time, Royce Creasey was seriously falling out with his erstwhile partners and the whole Voyager project was up on ice. Several attempts were made to find new backers but the decision was finally taken to sell off the four complete and one partially-built machine that had been made at the Crickhowell factory. I did manage to persuade Keith Duckworth to buy the 'Police' Voyager 03, and have ridden that one several times. The last time was alongside a Yamaha Majesty, at the end of which the bodged repair to the cable-operated gearchange (done at the '96 BMF Rally) gave up the ghost.

At some time in the not-too-distant-future, I will recount in more detail my torrid time with demonstrator 05, over 18 months and several thousand miles. PNB  
(NB If you want to know more about FF history, see the relevant back issues of MCS, 1983-1990. Also 'The Future Motorcycle' by PNB & Philippe Le Roux, MCS June 1991)