



Breakhart section, Cotswold Cup trial 1954, on the rigid Sun.

## CHAPTER 3

# BILL FAULKNER - FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPORT

Though never a superstar, Bill Faulkner enjoyed many years competing on both two and three wheels, and, although his ready smile sometimes suggested he was 'taking it easy,' he was a top class performer during the golden era of one-day trials.

Once described by famous scribe Ralph Venables as being “erratically brilliant,” there were few major national trials in the 1950s and '60s where the name of WGR ‘Bill’ Faulkner didn’t figure in the results. Exceptionally good on the rocks – especially in the Highlands of Scotland, where he competed 13 times in the six-day classic – Bill was one of the trials world’s great characters; a man who for over 25 years rode with a smile on his face in the sport he loved.

To find out more about his long and successful off-road career – which began on a BSA Bantam in 1952, and went on to include both one- and six-day observation trials, two memorable rides in the ISDT, the occasional outing on the scrambles track, and three eventful seasons in sidecar trials – I met up with him at the beautiful home he shares with his wife, Maureen, in rural Oxfordshire. That Bill Faulkner should have become a motorcyclist was not surprising, as from an early age the sound of bike engines and the aroma of hot oil was in his blood. He takes up the story:

“After starting out both building and selling push-bikes – called the Cardigan cycle – by 1936 my father had progressed to motorcycles, and two years later he became the BSA agent in Oxford. He competed in several prewar long distance events like the MCC’s Exeter and

Land’s End, and bought an ex-works BSA M24 outfit on which he had his annual outing in the local Colmore Cup national trial. When I was in my early teens I got involved in cycle speedway, but I’d been bitten by the trials bug and could hardly wait until I was 16 – no schoolboy sport in those days – and my first motorcycle. This was a new 125cc D1 Bantam which dad took from stock, and, along with my two pals Pat Lamper and Joe Johnson – who would later both become top line scramblers – I spent countless hours practising at the nearby gravel pits. My first event was a Henley-on-Thames club trial, and although I didn’t win an award I had a decent ride and managed to finish exactly halfway in the results.”

Although Faulkner senior was fully supportive of his son’s trials career, and supplied him with the Bantam, he was – as Bill recalled – not so forthcoming when it came to giving him a job when he left school.

“During my school days I used to go down to the workshop and ‘get in the way,’ so when I left school it wasn’t too much of a surprise when my dad told me he wouldn’t employ me, and I went to the local iron works as a toolmakers apprentice for five years. I had to work a 49-hour week and they paid me £2 10s; out of that I gave my mum 30



1950 Cotswold: Tom on the 125 TBS leads Bill Nicholson on his works Bantam – Tom first, Bill second. (Courtesy Bill Cole)

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Aviating the BSA at Hawkstone Park in 1953. (Courtesy Bill Cole)

## Off-Road Giants!



**Plenty of style from Nick and Dave Beavis on 007.**

to a Watsonian VG21 chair, and by the time we'd finished 'preparing' it with scaffolding boards on the floor it weighed a ton. One of our friends, Mick Spurling, had a 5cwt three-speed Morris van, so to get to the meeting we removed the front seat, took the rear wheel out of the bike, and detached the chair – which was strapped to the roof – and eight of us managed to squeeze in alongside the Matchless. We were full of enthusiasm, but the shortcomings of our bike – with its heavy chair – were soon evident, and in our heat we were still struggling to complete our first lap when the winner crossed the finishing line. We had no money to get anything more competitive, and it's thanks to our six friends who chipped in 2/6d each a week we managed to keep the bike running during that first season. The motor was very tired, and the Burman gearbox kept breaking, but things started to improve when we got another 500cc Matchless engine from a complete bike we

found in a skip, and in '63 we won our first prize money. We were at the Rushden circuit, which featured lots of adverse camber and a mud hole with a stream running through it. Many of the outfits got bogged down in the mud, but, with help from our mates, Dave and I managed to keep moving, and we were up to third in our heat when the chain snapped. We thought that that was the end of our day's racing, but it transpired that only two other outfits had finished, so as we had been running third the organisers invited us to line up in the final. Again there were plenty of breakdowns, and when the chequered flag fell we were one of only three outfits still circulating: we won ten shillings for third place, and felt like millionaires!"

It was during that tough 1962 season that Nick first raced against Mike Guilford – a man who later in the '60s would become one of his fiercest rivals – and he also got some gas welding gear to make his first



Trying hard on the factory Matchless: not his most favoured machine.

“A BATTALION OF  
RUSSIAN SOLDIERS  
CAME MARCHING  
DOWN THE TRACK,  
SO TO AVOID THEM  
SEEING ME I HASTILY  
COVERED UP THE  
BIKE WITH BRACKEN  
AND LAY DOWN IN A  
DITCH”



Clocking in behind a CZ rider during the '64 ISDT in East Germany, where he won a gold medal on the AMC factory single.

## Off-Road Giants!



**Gordon (11) battling with Dave Gladwin at Leighton in March 1964.  
(Courtesy Gordon Francis)**

“After watching a few sections I decided that trials looked like a lot of fun, so I joined the local Weyburn club and a couple of weeks later I entered my first event. This was a Thames Ditton club trial, and I surprised myself by having quite a good ride – I finished runner-up in the novice class, beaten by just five marks.”

The young Adsett’s potential was there for all to see, and it only took five trials for him to be upgraded to the experts class; a steep learning curve, because, as he recalled, there was plenty of top class opposition in the south eastern centre, including Don Smith, Gordon Jackson, and ‘visiting’ stars like Jeff Smith and Eric Adcock, who were both stationed in the army camp at nearby Borden.

“At that time I couldn’t afford a car or a van, so for the first three or four seasons I was forced to ride my bike to the trials, which meant I was limited mostly to local club and open to centre events, although sometimes I managed to cadge a lift from Comerford’s Reg May, who lived about four miles away. I learnt a lot from watching the likes of Smithy and Eric Adcock, and, after switching to a new 197cc Cotton, I started to pick up a few open to centre awards, which earned me some support from the Gloucester factory. The same season, I was selected to represent the Weyburn club in the centre team trial at Brands Hatch, but I realised that, if was going to improve, I had to widen my horizons and tackle some of the big nationals. My first was the Wye Valley, which I went to with Bob Golner, and after the open to centre trials the severity of the sections was a bit of a shock. I vividly recall one called Middle Cwm, which at the time looked horrendous, and I couldn’t believe that anyone could ride it feet up, but of course some of the aces made it look all too easy.

“I missed quite a bit of the 1958 season with bronchial pneumonia, but by the following winter I’d secured a first class award in the Mitchell, and it felt like a major breakthrough. By this time my brother, Derek, was riding and this certainly gave me an all important extra competitive edge, especially when he started beating me.”

Four years his junior, Derek began his trials career on an ex-Bill Faulkner Vale-Onslow Francis Barnett, and from the outset looked a natural. He was quickly upgraded to the expert class, and the sibling rivalry acted as a spur to Gordon, with both Adsett brothers regularly featuring in the results of southern-based events. In a shared van, they were now spreading their wings to the trade-supported nationals in far away Devon and Derbyshire, although, as Gordon recalled, this was not without incident or drama.

“For a while we had a 10cwt Bedford three-speed van, which, in October 1961, we drove to Devon for the West of England. I had a good ride, and was pleased to be included in Max King’s after-trial radio report, when he told the listeners that ‘Gordon Adsett was the only rider to clean Shortway section.’ However, I wasn’t quite so pleased when, on the journey home, the van broke its axle. We managed to borrow a rope from fellow competitor Bill Martin and got a tow as far as Sparkford, where we parked overnight in a lay-by. The following day, we off-loaded the bikes and rode to Shepton Mallet to compete in another trial, and I think we eventually arrived back home around midnight, just as the semi-floating hub and wheel fell off! We pensioned it off and then got a Morris 1000 pick-up from Peter Stirland, and also got a couple of Comerford Cubs, which were two brilliant little bikes.”

For the next two seasons the names of G or D Adsett and their Comerford Cubs featured regularly in the results of major trials, but Gordon was frustratingly denied a premier award in a national event. However, as he recalled, he came agonisingly close in the Mitcham Vase.

“The Mitcham was one of the most important in the south east, and counted towards the ACU’s prestigious trials star, which was the forerunner to the British championship. Towards the end of the ’62 event, Derek and I were riding around together, and as we arrived at the last section we were tying for the premier. This was a very muddy climb, and after walking it I went first, but footed; however, learning from my mistake, Derek went clean, and won the trial by one mark. It was very frustrating to be beaten by a single dab, but, strangely enough, it did a lot for my confidence, as I’d always considered him to be the better rider, and getting so close to winning gave me a whole new belief in my ability to compete with the best.”

This new confidence soon brought its rewards, with first class awards in many of the important nationals, and the offer of a works Greeves. Gordon later discovered that the man with the hat and long coat he had seen at the start of the Gott Memorial trial back in 1955 – Ralph Venables – had recommended him for the factory ride, and he recalled some of the highlights from the next three winter seasons on the Thundersley two-strokes.

“It was quite a surprise when Derry Preston-Cobb approached me with the offer of a works machine; it’s not every day you get the chance of having a free bike with factory support, so, as you can imagine, it wasn’t a difficult decision to make. They were a great little company to ride for, and the agreement with Cobby was that they supplied the bike and spares, and also paid for my entries and expenses to compete in the trade-supported nationals. At that time they were supporting a huge numbers of trials and scrambles riders, which meant that Bill Brooker and his team in the competition department were always working flat out keeping all the works bikes in tip-top condition. By then I’d been working as a mechanic in the Victoria motor works in Godalming for six years, so I did all my own engine preparation work and fettling,