

Editorial

Just about all my life I have been aware of the writings of one Ralph Venables.

Initially, when I was given the choice of the Dandy, Beano or 'the blue un', Mum and Dad couldn't afford to fund an 8 year old's pocket money to purchase all, I plumped for the 'blue un'. For those who haven't the slightest idea of what I am talking about, the Dandy and Beano were kiddie comics of the first order whilst the 'blue un' was The Motor Cycle and the 'green un' was Motorcycling. Back in those days each of the weekly magazines, because that is what they were, had their own dedicated following. Why was I a member of the 'blue un' fraternity? Well there could have been some reasoning that one of my cousins was an avid reader of the 'green un' so it was the obvious route to go to get the 'blue un' so that we could do 'swapsies' and get the best of both worlds as there was no doubt that each magazine was tailored to a slightly different market.

What was very apparent though, and this applied to both of the weeklies, was that the editorial teams and contributors prided themselves on the very high standard of grammar that was used when writing the articles. This not only made the articles more interesting as the writers, with their use of the english language, were able to make even the most insignificant technical innovation seem like the best thing since sliced bread (had it been invented then?). I am sure that the avid reading of both blue and green uns was of great benefit to me during my early years in improving my understanding of the english language enabling me to both pass the 11 plus and later to get a good pass at 'O' level english language.

Now this brings me back to Ralph Venables. To be honest, I cannot for the life of me remember which one he wrote for but I wouldn't be surprised he wrote for both of them at the same time! With the demise of the weekly magazines and the arrival of the tabloid type motorcycle press, Ralph initially wrote for MCN and then 'jumped ship' and began what has turned out to be 1000 consecutive weekly columns for their one time arch-rival the T+MX. Now anno domini and motor neurone disease has caught up with Ralph and he has, reluctantly, called it a day on a regular basis. A great shame as this would now seem to be the end of an era which has lasted for more than half the time that motorcycle sport has been in existence.

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The November Plonkaround

Raydon Pit, Wades Lane, Raydon, Nr Ipswich, Suffolk
Saturday 30th November 2002

From noon

Trials practise for:

Pre 65 solos • Pre 65 sidecars • Twin Shocks
Youths • Twin Shock sidecars

As has been written elsewhere, Ralph has been responsible for the introduction to manufacturer's teams of many of the top riders over the years. What isn't perhaps so well known is his involvement in being a pioneer in looking after our rights in the countryside.

An even less well known aspect about him is that he is a world renowned authority and writer on Jazz. In fact I believe that he was the Jazz editor of the *New Musical Express* for some time after the war.

I fear that the days of articles with good grammar are likely to be a thing of the past now that we seem to be in an age where free expression is the be all and end all of the written word. The sometimes moronic shorthand that purports to be English but is practised by text messagers is regarded as the norm even by those who write emails. I must be getting old!

To celebrate, well that isn't really the correct term, Ralphs retirement I am, with the permission of Deryk Wylde, serialising an article written by Dave Gittins about Ralph and this will in due time be brought up to date by a contribution of Mick Brown who has known Ralph, man and boy.

The weather forecast for our visit to Brian Horrigan's orchard was not much different to that of last year. We were promised rain and wind fit to rival the worst that Michael Fish can dream up - but, thankfully, the day dawned bright and dry with the forecasters having back pedalled a little, giving us the window of the morning and early afternoon before the weather arrived.

Quite a good entry once again for a club event but . . . once again we were surprisingly short of observers with regular organisers rides having to be given up to observe instead. I do find this disappointing as the club must boast quite a lot of members as I produce over 140 copies of the magazine each month for distribution.

Although the weather was anticipated to be wet and parts of Suffolk during the previous week and had been under some feet of water, the reed beds at Wivenhoe were dry with not enough mud to provide the normal sections.

Once again Little Eric surprised his master with the amount of grip that was available and attempted to chuck him off the back.

Ray Gibb was out once again on the twin-shock Bultonda. It almost gets to the ripping calico sort of revs which is most unnerving to those of us used to 'conventional' trials machines running at relatively low revs.

Tracey and I were 'away for the day' at Rugby when the Leonard Cheshire Trial took place. Seems that everybody enjoyed themselves, especially the President's lady who I understand was accompanied on observing duties by 'tall dark and handsome' soldiers. Rumour has it that this is the reason that El P was seen contemplating the pond - mind you there was a lifebuoy available in case of 'accidents'.

I would like, on behalf of the club, to thank all those who had a hand in arranging the event, especially Mick Brown for thinking the idea up. We must look forward to a repeat visit in 2003.

We didn't get as far as the John Easty trial at Tunstall - in fact I didn't get very far at all other than innumerable trips up and down the stairs to the smallest room in our house. No, I haven't been eating too many beans even though the weather was what one might call a bit 'windy' that day. I gather that it wasn't too comfortable what with trees falling in close proximity to sections and the route. Thankfully no-one got hurt but it does make me wonder about the risk involved in running the event in a forest in those prevailing weather conditions.



Alan Farmer at Wivenhoe

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Thumpers time will soon be with us and Tracey has written an article later on in the magazine to get you up to speed on what is happening. However, don't forget, if you are available and willing to observe, then please get in contact with Ted.

Another lovely day for the Plonkers Classic at Covenbrook Hall. I was surprised when I got there that it was quite so wet under foot as we would seem to have missed out on the rain that had fallen overnight. Sixty riders, sunny weather, four laps of ten good old fashioned sections, what else do you want?

Graham Braybrook was out on the Henfield (for a change) and going by what he said at the end of the trial it may be the last time we see Graham Henfield mounted. I got the impression that small chickens are a lot easier to ride when ones years start to advance. Could be that there might be two well prepared Henfields up for sale in the near future!

Chris Bater, not satisfied with being part of the advertising material for this years Jack Thompson trial, decided to take an early bath (twice)! What some people will do just to get noticed!

Nice to see Geoff Daw circulating with a great big grin on his face - I hope that Geoff isn't going to feel too many after-effects on his excursion. I know the feeling - it is necessary to do something to enjoy yourself even though you know that you will pay for it later.

The Millenium Triumph was circulating again following the handlebar break-ing episode in Tunstall Forest. This time, when compared to Snaque Pit, it was sounding really sweet. I understand that Roger is fitting the outrigger to it in readiness for the Thumpers.

I have come across failed wheel bearings several times in my life but . . . what ever happened to the rear wheel of Chris Huxtable's Greeves - it was almost as if someone had stolen the complete wheel bearing!

Over the past few years there would appear to be more and more of our number who are finding need for the use of the 'national truss' and other (non-athletic) support systems. I suppose that this is all to do with abuse and failure to look after various body parts over the many years of off-road activity. Well, I am proud to announce that the EFA in conjunction with the newly formed Boxford Superior Truss Company will be giving a seal of approval to trusses and other impedimenta that are found to be useful to our membership.

Our favourite suspension and parts specialist has informed me that he has secured another batch of IRC tyres. It is a case of buy now whilst stocks last as there is no guarantee that any more will become available in the near future, even the next 12 months. Pompous will be open for business as usual on club night.

All the best,

Jim

Secretarys Scribblings

Going back to the beginning of October, we start our roundup with a BIG Thank You to Mick Brown and the folk from the Leonard Cheshire Seven Rivers Home for organising such a great event (the Secretary's Signing On facilities were brilliant all that headroom - we were really spoilt) Mick had found ten imaginative sections around the grounds, each one was named, but I think you'll find more about this elsewhere in the Newsletter so I'll say no more except that we hope to be able to return next year.

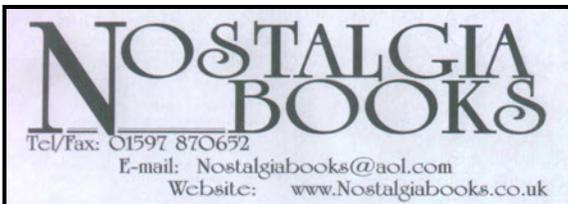
The Copdock Show fitted into it's new home very nicely. Can't say we saw anything to get excited about on the Jumble stalls but there were plenty of interesting bikes on the Club Stands. With a Bar, Live Band, White Helmets Display and plenty to occupy the kids, the Organisers had thought of something for everyone. Only down side was that someone seemed to have forgotten to unlock the loos!

Another successful trial was held at Wivenhoe. We were very lucky to finish just ahead of the rain. Hopefully Brian's garden remained intact this year.

Leafing through Old Bike Mart we came across a report on the Brooklands Dash run by the National Sprint Association and the Vintage Motorcycle Club. The third paragraph started off with "Cohn Moss was post War Vintage star, his 650cc Triumph running a 7.59s, 88 mph best, despite running on the Brooklands enforced silencers", well done Cohn.

Made our way up to a rather breezy Tunstall Forest at the end of the month along with 83 or so other like-minded souls. One or two trees came down without doing any damage (other than to themselves) which is more than can be said for my chauffeur - yes Roger was riding solo again. No mechanical gremlins this time, just snapped handlebars, don't think I want to get in the sidecar again, that might be the next thing to snap!

Heather



Nostalgia Books, PO Box 4, Llandrindod Wells LD6 5WF

Dear EFA Members,

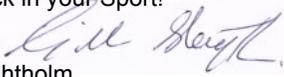
Thank you all so much for the cheque we received today. Together with the proceeds from the raffle, bar and balloon sales the event made us the grand sum of £305! This will soon be put to good use in the home. Thank you again for supporting the event, buying raffle tickets, drinks and balloon race tickets.

The trial provided a completely different event for us and was greatly enjoyed by many of our residents, staff families and friends.

We also enjoyed seeing the soldiers in action, marshalling the event, and we have thanked their Commanding Officer for allowing them to attend.

Finally! Thanks once again.

Good luck in your Sport!



Gill Sleightholm

Manager

P.S. From Mick Brown

Thanks for supporting this first time event. I'm already planning next year! What made me really proud was when I walked the car park and course on Sunday morning there was not a speck of litter to be seen. Well done!





Photos by: J. Rayner

Elderly Sex

An elderly married couple scheduled their annual medical examination on the same day so they could travel together.

After the examination, the doctor then said to the elderly man:

"You appear to be in good health. Do you have any medical concerns that you would like to ask me?"

"In fact, I do," said the old man. "After I have sex with my wife the first time, I am usually hot and sweaty, and then, after I have sex with my wife the second time, I'm usually cold and chilly."

After examining the elderly lady, the doctor said: "Everything appears to be fine. Do you have any medical concerns that you would like to discuss with me?"

The lady replied that she had no questions or concerns.

The doctor then asked: "Your husband had an unusual concern. He claims that he is usually hot and sweaty after having sex the first time with you and then cold and chilly after the second time. Do you know why?"

"Oh, that crazy old fool!" she replied.

"That's because the first time is usually in July and the second time is usually in December!"

Drive up 'Hole in the wall' Procedures

Drive up 'Hole in the wall' Procedures:

To enable customers to use this new facility the following procedures have been established. Please read the procedure that applies to your own circumstances And remember them when you use the machine for the first time:

MEN:

- 1) Drive up to the cash machine.
- 2) Lower your car window.
- 3) Insert card into machine and enter PIN.
- 4) Enter amount of cash required.
- 5) Retrieve card, cash and receipt.
- 6) Drive off.

WOMEN:

- 1) Drive up to cash machine.
- 2) Backup to align car window to machine.
- 3) Set hand brake, lower the window.
- 4) Find handbag, remove all contents on to passenger seat to locate card.
- 5) Turn the radio down.
- 6) Attempt to insert card into machine.
- 7) Open car door to allow easier access to machine due to its excessive distance from the car.
- 8) Insert card.
- 9) Re-insert card right side up.
- 10) Dig through handbag to find diary with your PIN written on the inside back page.
- 11) Enter PIN.
- 12) Press cancel and re-enter correct PIN.
- 13) Enter amount of cash required.
- 14) Check make up in rear view mirror
- 15) Retrieve cash and receipt.
- 16) Empty handbag again to locate wallet and place cash inside.
- 17) Place receipt in back of chequebook.
- 18) Re-check make-up.
- 19) Drive two feet forward - slam on brakes.
- 20) Backup to cash machine.
- 21) Retrieve card.
- 22) Re-empty hand bag, locate card holder, and place card into the slot provided.
- 23) Give appropriate one-fingered hand signal to irate male drivers waiting behind.
- 24) Restart stalled engine and drive away.
- 25) Drive for 2 to 3 miles.
- 26) Notice smoke coming from the rear of car - Release hand brake.



The Plonkers Classic at Covenbrook Hall

I thought it was a really good trial with sections that looked both interesting to ride and a bit on the tricky side - just what is wanted for the prestige trial of that club. Covenbrook Hall was in prime condition. I understand that riders came from as far away as Cheshire and I hope that they enjoyed themselves and found that the long journey was worthwhile.

Anticlockwise:

Mick Honeyball 246 Greeves

Ray Gibb fighting 'Big' Eric

John Phillips 246 Ariel Dove





Crab & Winkle Trial



ACU Permit No: 27579

20th October 2002

"Hawthorn", Anglesea Road, Wivenhoe, Essex

Provisional Results

A good day was enjoyed by all even though the going was most unlike we normally associate with crabbing and winkling - hardly a bit of mud in sight! Hopefully we all managed to get out of Brians garden before the heavens opened.

It was nice to see several of our 'gentlemen' riding the 'harder' route and enjoying themselves.

Harder Route

No.	Name	Machine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot
23	Roger Finch	500 Ariel	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00100	00000	00000	00000	1
30	Sam Appleton	350 Royal Enfield	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	11100	3
29	Mark Fletcher	500 Royal Enfield	00050	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	10000	00000	6
25	Colin Teager	250 Greeves	10000	00000	00000	00000	00001	00020	00000	00000	00110	00000	6
19	Graham Braybrook	175 B.S.A.	00000	00000	00000	00000	00500	00000	00000	00000	00030	00000	8
16	John Chapman	197 James	30000	00100	00000	00000	00000	01000	00000	00030	00000	11000	10
21	Peter Teager	250 B.S.A.	00000	00000	01000	00000	51100	00000	00100	00000	01001	00000	11
37	Chris Mace	500 Royal Enfield	20000	00010	00000	00000	21011	00100	01000	00000	00002	10000	13
22	Jeffrey Fincham	350 Rariefield	02000	00000	00110	51000	00100	00000	00100	00000	11101	00100	17
10	Jim Mason	250 Suzuki	00010	00100	21000	20000	05500	00000	00000	00000	00000	02000	19
20	Steve Parker	350 Royal Enfield	21010	00100	00000	00000	11312	00000	00000	00000	10123	00000	20
31	Brian Fletcher	500 Royal Enfield	00100	50000	10100	10000	05000	00000	50010	00000	10000	00000	21
12	Alan Farmer	350 Royal Enfield	00100	05000	00000	30000	00010	32000	00010	00000	00001	05001	23
13	Trevor Andrews	350 Triumph	01201	10000	10000	50000	02010	00000	00000	00000	00055	00000	24
15	Mark Gibb	350 Royal Enfield	01221	00010	00000	00000	00211	01030	00000	00010	02033	01110	27
39	Bob Spencer	250 Greeves	20000	00205	00000	00110	25120	51500	00000	00000	00201	01011	38
4	Chris Byford-Smith	326 Bultaco	31331	15200	00000	00000	12253	10025	10000	00000	02051	01000	50
1	Mark Wilson	350 Royal Enfield	11111	53213	00000	31300	05212	11211	15010	20101	31133	21251	75
32	John Ives	250 Firefly	31	55	010	530	333	532	531	300	235	55	ret

Twain Shocks (Gentleman Route)

No.	Name	Machine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot
33	John Beasley	325 Bultaco	00000	00000	00010	00100	00000	00000	10000	00000	00000	00000	3
5	Darren Chapman	250 Ossa	00005	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	01000	00000	10000	00100	8
6	Rod Chapman	350 Bultaco	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00500	31000	00000	00530	01111	21
3	John Beet	250 Ossa	10000	00000	00011	00000	00003	00000	15000	01000	00552	21132	34

Youth (Gentleman Route)

No.	Name	Machine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot
28	Harrison Payne	80 Yamaha	50000	03000	00000	00000	00000	00000	02100	00000	50553	00252	38
36	Andrew Jackson	212 Fantic	0	0	0	1	51	2	5	0	1	3	ret

Gentlemen

No.	Name	Machine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot
11	Mick Brown	199 Triumph	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	00100	0000	0000	0000	1
38	Brian Neale	250 B.S.A.	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	0000	00100	0000	00100	0000	2
35	Ian Preedy	275 Little Eric	00001	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00105	00000	7
18	Albert Dove	350 D.O.T.	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00010	01010	50000	00000	00000	8
24	John Phillips	200 Triumph	00000	00000	00010	00000	50000	00000	00000	00000	00233	00000	14
26	Andy Spreadbridge	250 Greeves	00000	03000	00000	00010	00000	00000	00010	00000	00503	00010	14
17	Dave Kenward	343 B.S.A.	00000	00000	00001	50000	00000	00000	10000	00000	00310	31000	15
9	Kevin Goldsmith	350 B.S.A.	10000	00010	00000	00000	00000	00000	30110	00002	00005	11000	16
27	Mick Honeyball	250 Greeves	01100	00020	00150	00000	00000	00000	10000	00000	00000	12101	16
2	Nick May	500 Ariel	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00205	00050	05500	12101	27
7	Chris Huxtable	250 Greeves	00000	20000	50010	10050	00000	00000	10000	10000	10002	23313	31
34	Daniel Cranfield	500 Ariel	00	00000	00	00	00	10000	002	00000	035	011	ret

Twin Shocks (Harder Route)

No.	Name	Machine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot
8	Peter Daw	250 Ossa	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00003	00000	3
14	Ray Gibb	200 Bultonda	00000	00000	00000	00000	00000	00010	00000	00000	00003	00155	15



Dave Kenward testing the stitching on his trials jeans



Little Eric taking his master for a ride.

It's Thumpers Time - Again

Well, at the time of writing there is only one week for entries to come in, i.e. closing date is Monday next week. However, at present entries are pretty low to put it mildly - certainly far lower than I have had at this time in the entry process. Yes, currently we have just 58 entries. So, the big question is: are we going to break 100 entries. Somehow I have my doubts. I know I've expressed worries about it before but we've never been this low with one week before close of entries.



For some reason we are short of entries from the South-Eastern Centre but surely it can't all be down to that. It looks like I'm going to be on the phone trying to conjour up some entries but believe me I could do without that as I have so much other work to do including a job which has to be out by the end of next week otherwise I miss my deadline. Still, I suppose I'll have to do something. At the present rate we'll need to get something like seven entries per day to get to 100. I would like to think though that we'll get to 80 although that remains to be seen.

I'd like to think we break 100 but I have grave doubts. Whatever the entry may be though, the trial will go ahead although it's unlikely to be quite what it has been with what appears to be the lowest entry I believe the Thumpers to have had for many a long year - certainly since I've been Secretary of the Meeting. Obviously we don't yet know what the entry will be but we'd need an unprecedented load of mail to get the 100 we normally have by the closing date.

As I said last month, we would like all participants to bring along a little something for the observers to show the appreciation of the riders for the job they do.

As is usual, Ted and gang are going to Thorrington this coming Sunday 10th November to sort out what sections they are going to lay out. Anyone willing to go along should contact Ted to find out what the plans are.

Tracey

Please Note:

The closing date by which all articles and adverts to be included in the December issue of Trials & Tribulations should reach the editorial office is Monday 25th November.

Material for inclusion in the magazine may be supplied in the following forms:

handwritten • typed • computer hard copy • fax • email • floppy disc

If providing computer hard copy, a font size of 12pt minimum is preferred whilst articles supplied on floppy disc should be saved in text format.

The Sage of Swallowcliffe

by Dave Gittins



(Reproduced by kind permission of Deryk Wylde)

Part 1

Thinking of Ralph Venables the word 'doyen' quickly comes to mind, my dictionary defines doyen as the senior member of a body or profession. Few would argue that Ralph is the doyen of off-road motorcycle journalism and that he has held that position, with his own distinctive brand of commentary, for more years than even he often cares to remember.

Variouly called the Squire of Swallowcliffe and a number of other titles I am reluctant to repeat in a family journal, Ralph (pronounced Rafe) is a legend in his own lifetime. Few can make that claim to fame, especially in the area of off-road.

Duke, Surtees and Hailwood all became household names, but then road racing was always the glamorous end of motorcycling.

In the field of trials and scrambles there is simply nobody to rival Ralph's prodigious memory and vast experience which stretches back almost sixty years. To followers of both disciplines, and they include riders, officials, spectators and fellow scribes he is either the best thing since sliced bread or a cantankerous old scribbler. However, he commands great respect everywhere for the dedication, commitment and professionalism that he brings to the sport.

So who is this R. G. Venables? Who is this enigmatic character with the drive and energy of a man half his age?

To find out some of the answers to these and similar questions I recently went in search of Ralph and found him in the depths of Wiltshire, just off the A30 Salisbury to Shaftesbury road in a small, typically English village called Swallowcliffe.

I found his home, the Old Forge, easily. Ralph's directions were precise and accurate like everything else he does, he had also put up a trials 'Left' sign on the telegraph pole opposite the cottage. Very soon Ralph was out in the road with a purposeful stride and a warm welcome. We were soon deep in conversation.

What did I find? Well, on entering his study I felt that I could fill a book. Memorabilia, artefacts, maps, photographs, books and gramophone records filled every available space. It seemed easiest to start at the beginning and in a sunny window overlooking the village we talked.

RGV was born in Oxford in 1914 and spent his early years there. It was from Oxford that he was to set out on his first journey to a motorcycle event - a journey that was to influence the rest of his life. On the pillion (do you remember pillion seats?) of his brother's bike he went to Frimley, near Camberley to watch the second Southern Scott scramble.

Riding pillion over a solid frame was a slow and painful process in the 1920's but Ralph was hooked! He wanted to see more of this new sport of motorcycle scrambling.

Unfortunately Oxford (unlike later years) was something of an outpost in the motorcycling world in those days when much of the world's motorcycle industry revolved around Armoury Road, Bracebridge Street and Priory Street in the distant industrial Midlands.

Fortune took a hand and smiled on Ralph when the Venables family moved to Farnham in Surrey in 1928. For the second time the 'gin and Jag. belt' of Surrey was to have a unique influence in the formative years of the young Venables.

Farnham was the home of Len Heath and his brother Joe, who were already becoming known nationally in the fast growing sports of motorcycle trials and scrambles. Len Heath quickly took the enthusiastic young Venables under his wing to form a relationship that was to last for the rest of Heath's life. More importantly, Heath was to have a profound effect on the shaping and development of Ralph and his standards and values.

Qualities of fairness and good sportsmanship that were to stand him in good stead for the rest of his life, whether he was organising a trial or a scramble, or simply acting as an observer at a trial.

As top riders of the day, Len and Joe Heath competed in most of the major events. The Scottish Six Days Trial, the Scott Trial, the Southern Scott, the British Experts and the like. Ralph accompanied them everywhere, often riding in the boot of Len Heath's car. Ralph's future seemed certain - he would become a trials rider and emulate his hero, Heath.

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That, however, was not to be. Whilst competing in a Schoolboy trial at Croydon Ralph was involved in a road traffic accident and seriously injured. He spent two months in hospital.

The rest, as they say, is now history. Instead of grappling with the intricacies of balance and throttle control Ralph turned his attention and all his energies towards the administrative side of the sport.

The car accident had resulted in a sizeable compensation payment so Ralph was not penniless and so began a long and illustrious career; first as an official of the Sunbeam MCC and then as a freelance journalist.

It is a measure of the energy and determination that he expended in the good name of the sport that he was able to combine both activities with such success. Well over 250 events came in for the well known Venables treatment and benefited accordingly.

They included many nationals like the Sunbeam Point-to-Point and the Southern Experts Trial. And the secret of his success? The Venables method? Simple really, careful preparation, precise and professional organisation, meticulous attention to detail plus regular doses of fine tuning as the event unfolded. Those are the Venables hallmarks.

Additionally, Ralph is nothing if not a perfectionist and he rightly expects the same standards of those working with him. 'Second best' or 'enthusiastic amateur' are not phrases which trip easily off the Venables tongue!

If something is worth doing, be it writing a column or organising a trial, then it is worth doing well.

In 1957 he scaled down his official activities as an organiser and administrator, although he remained a Vice-President of the Sunbeam MCC. An article at the time in the 'Motor Cycle' indicated that he had retired!

But Ralph was a long way from retirement. Instead he turned to concentrate on writing and reporting. Reporting on the major events of the day and writing about the characters and opinion formers of the time.

During that period, often described by Ralph as the golden era of off-road sport, every major scramble and trial in the country received (at one time or another) the full impact of Venables critical attention and his typewriter was never still.

His output during the 50's and 60's was phenomenal, both for quantity and quality. As a result he amassed a tremendous fund of knowledge which, linked to his famous memory, makes him a walking encyclopaedia. Moreover if he doesn't know the answer he will certainly know the man who does!

It was during that period that he began to form preferences for certain types of event.

That is not to say that he has excluded all else, far from it, but events such as the SSDT and the ISDT (a long time favourite) and long distance reliability trials such as the Exeter and the Land's End became firm favourites.

Ralph has no time for the razzmatazz of modern trials and scrambles where tantrums and temperament seem to be a common feature of the competition. For Ralph the spirit of fair competition is all. The enjoyment of taking part and the achievement of finishing.

Of one thing you could be sure, during that golden era, whenever and wherever an important trial was held in the UK, Venables was there talking to people, finding out what was going on and why, generally getting around the course, the competitors and officials to build up his own picture of the prevailing atmosphere, the features of the hazards and the riders. And, of course, the results. All this would later be converted into a creative mix of words and pictures for readers of 'The Motor Cycle' or 'Motor Cycle News'.

During the period he also formed lasting friendships with competitors and officials, many that continue to this day.

Ralph has very definite views on virtually everything. He is quick to tell you that the period after the end of World War II and until the demise of the British motor cycle industry were halcyon days for our sport and I, for one, am not prepared to argue that point, he has equally firm views about individual riders.

(to be continued)

Please give generously.....

URGENT - DUDLEY EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

At 00:54 on Monday 23/9 an earthquake measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale hit Dudley, UK causing untold disruption & distress.

- Many were woken well before their giro arrived
- Several priceless collections of mementos from the Balearics and Spanish costas were damaged
- Three areas of historic and scientifically significant litter were disturbed
- Thousands are confused & bewildered, trying to come to terms with the fact that something interesting has happened in Dudley
- One resident, Donna-Marie Dutton, a 17 year old mother-of-three said "It was such a shock, little Chantal-Leanne came running into my bedroom crying. My youngest two, Tyler-Morgan and Megan-Storm slept through it. I was still shaking when I was watching Trisha the next morning."

Apparently though, looting did carry on as normal.

The British Red Cross have so far managed to ship 4000 crates of Sunny Delight to the area to help the stricken masses.

Rescue workers are still searching through the rubble and have found large quantities of personal belongings including benefit books and jewellery from Elizabeth Duke at Argos.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- £2 buys chips, scraps and blue pop for a family of four
- £10 can take a family to Stourport for the day, where children can play on an unspoiled canal bank among the national collection of stinging nettles
- 22p buys a biro for filling in a spurious compensation claim

PLEASE ACT NOW