

# An **English**-man's diary

During his career, **Glen English** has raced the occasional classic, Aermacchi, Tridents, and George Beale's G50's. Latterly he's successfully mastered Molnar Nortons, including a Senior Classic Manx win in 2000, but never did he imagine entering the history books as the first ever classic world champion. This is his story.



I desperately wanted to be in the world championship but Andy Molnar couldn't commit due to workload, so I approached Fred Walmsley. Fred had just won InCA with John Cronshaw, and wanted time with his family. However, he had a change of heart and as John was preparing his BSA, I got the ride.

In bitter cold February, we went to Mallory. I hadn't ridden for six months, and was nervous. The Norton looked beautiful bedecked with its famous number 7 from when Sheene raced it at Goodwood. The paddock was busy, mostly big slick-clad Jap' stuff, Ducatis etc. I questioned my being there on a 60hp single with skinny tyres. Everyone was taking it seriously, so I let them go before I went out. Around Gerard's, the bike felt perfect, Barry had obviously set it up well. It felt ideal, and soon I was passing riders on more powerful machinery. Within five laps I was clocking good times, and wondered what the superbike riders thought when this old classic passed them. Fred was beaming "Bloody 'ell lad, you looked like you'd been riding it all your life – you passed the bloody lot of them" Praise indeed, but it was so cold I don't think the slicks could get warm. I went out again, but soon pulled in. There was little point in circulating, wearing the bike out. Fred knew he could trust me and we packed up, feeling confident.

Just before we left, two 'modern' lads came over from the same session as me. Their faces, on seeing drum brakes, was a picture and one remarked "I don't think we'll ever live this one down."

Fred called the day after, "I've just spoken to Barry about yesterday,

really pleased he was, perked him right up and he wishes you luck for the championship". That was nice, Barry had a great influence over the team, and we all have great memories of him.

## SILVERSTONE: ROUNDS ONE AND TWO

Few InCA riders, myself included had ridden Silverstone, so we had to learn the track. In the first session I didn't feel comfortable. More relaxed in the second session, I came in two laps from the end and saw Steve Tomes on pole, I went back out and two laps later I took pole position.

### Race 1

Giving my then eight month old daughter Danielle a kiss, I asked her to wish me luck, I do this because I'm sure this little angel does magic! I got a good start and led the race for the first few laps. Behind, Steve was right there, followed by Phill Sharp, on Brian Richards' Summerfield Tickle. I kept my eye on the lap board but near the end of the race my rev counter came adrift and I had to rip it off. Steve went through but ran wide. I held back, waiting for the last lap. Then, as we exited the last chicane the chequered flag went out and Steve won, I couldn't believe it as I was counting the laps. When I sorted the rev counter I'd missed the last lap board!

Fred said later that if the exposed rev wire had touched metal, the ignition would have cut out. The rev counter was returned undamaged and refitted in working order.

**TOP:** At speed on the Norton, at Donington.



## Race 2

We geared the bike up, as I'd been looking for an extra gear. John led and I followed for a couple of laps before taking over. He came past again but I rode round him at the first turn, a fast right, and we bumped fairings. Phil also passed me at one point. By three quarter distance I led again but the bike didn't feel good. The exhaust note was increasing and as I headed toward the flag, it suddenly rose and I whipped in the clutch to coast home. An experimental cylinder stud had broken causing the head seal to blow. I beat John by the slimmest of margins and left Silverstone with a nine point lead. I thanked Danielle for her magic. I had scored more points than anyone else, all I had to do was repeat it at the next round.

## A1 RING AUSTRIA: ROUND THREE AND FOUR

Unlike the other InCA riders, I needed to learn the track. I flew out with George Beale and the InCA crowd and arriving at the track, on Friday, the Porsche OC had the circuit for the day. I persuaded one owner to take me round for a few laps to learn the layout.

Fred had brought a brand new Seeley short stroke G50. It looked beautiful and never having ridden a Seeley before I was keen to try it.

### 1st practice (timed)

I rode the Manx, but it was detonating so pulled in to let Fred richen up the mixture. It continued to detonate and I pulled in again but the session was stopped following a crash.

### 2nd practice (timed)

Fred wanted me to try the Seeley, it had never been on a race track and was just run in. The seat was a bit short but otherwise it felt perfect. After three laps I let Fred check it over and went out again but only managed three laps before the session ended. As I rode into Parc Ferme, the team were really excited. I had pole and a new lap record too!

## Race 1

Fred asked me to ride the Seeley, as he hadn't cured the Manx. With a good start I got into a dice with Adrie De Ridder and Phill Sharp, but took the lead on lap two and pulled away. Suddenly as I exited turn two, an uphill hairpin, the bike swung to the left, ran off the track, over the rumble strips, across the grass and then back onto



the track. Looking down I saw a broken steering damper catching on the frame tubes, locking the steering. I thought I would have to retire but found I could hold the damper in my left hand on the straights and then with my thumb on corners. Not the easiest way to ride, but I set about catching Adrie and Phill and we battled for the rest of the race. Starting the last lap I was third, but had a plan. There was no point leading at the start of the last lap as I would have been passed again as my thumb was becoming painful. Coming out of the third from last corner, I pulled up on Phill and as we peeled off for the next, a fast right, I gave it everything and went underneath him. Sliding both wheels, I just managed to pull it back in line. Phill reckoned it looked impressive and I pretended I did it all the time! At the last corner I caught Adrie and draught past him across the line. Fred was ecstatic, with that red face of his beaming. He gave me a big hug, and a kiss and said "You're a bloody star, new bike, pole position, win race and break lap record, it don't get better than that." John Cronshaw suffered a misfire and made fourth, so I increased my lead to 18 points.

## Race 2

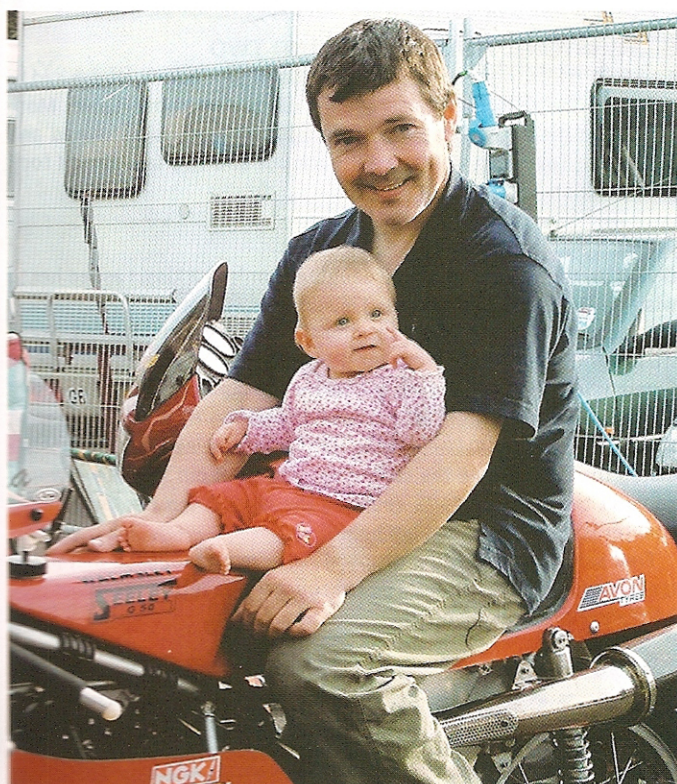
John needed to win to stop me romping the championship and led immediately. The pace was quicker than the opener and we soon dropped off Adrie and Phill. He rode so hard to drop me, but I followed him and he didn't look round all race. (I asked him about it later and he said "I could see your shadow!") I tried to force him into a mistake but knew it wouldn't happen, this was Cronshaw at his best. At three quarter distance, on the final corner of the lap, both wheels broke away and the BSA shook violently, but he shrugged it off. A lap later, on the same corner, it happened to me and certainly woke me up! I reckoned I'd enough power to pass him and hold the lead to the line but, as we started the last lap, I put the power on too early, lost the back and had to shut off, it was impossible to pass him safely. I followed him to a well deserved victory. It was probably the best I'd seen him race, but I took a record fastest lap.

## DONINGTON PARK: ROUNDS FIVE AND SIX

Steve Tomes was a wild card for this event, riding a FWD Norton owned by Phillip Morris. Everyone told me not to get involved in a race with Steve, as John was the main threat. However, if I could put Steve between John, it would be even better.

### 1st practice (timed)

I rode the Manx, everything was fine and I was fastest. Then Steve developed a problem with his Manx and Fred gave him my spare bike, the Seeley, for the rest of the session, and he had the audacity to go



**TOP:** Glen's main challenger throughout the world series, was reigning InCA champion, John Cronshaw (Unity BSA).

**LEFT:** Glen and his magic working 'little angel' – daughter Danielle.





pole, with a 1.49 lap. This was the first time anyone had officially gone 1.49, it was the talk of the paddock.

#### 2nd practice (timed)

This time I used the Seeley. It felt better than the Manx through the slower bends, but the Manx was better through the fast sections, Craner to Coppice. By the end of the session I was almost half a second quicker than Steve. Everyone reckoned it was because I was on the Seeley, but I disagreed. If I had ridden the Seeley first, when I was getting up to speed, and then taken the Manx out, I would have put the Manx on pole in the 1.49's. I proved this in the second race by setting fastest lap at 1.50 when the brakes were shot. I agreed to ride the Seeley in the opener, knowing how precious the Manx was to Fred, being Barry's bike and all that!

#### Race 1

An uneventful race for me, I took the lead from the start and just tried to stay there. Colin Breeze, on the Summerfield Petty, had a good go but Steve and John both retired early. I was worried that if I pushed too hard I would burn my brakes on such a very hot day. Colin took yards out of me on the brakes but I made it up down Craner, all the time trying to save my brakes for the last lap. I looked behind but by the last lap Colin had dropped back and I won.

#### Race 2

I chose the Manx, especially for Andy Molnar, as I did not want people to think that the Seeley was superior to the Manx, as that is not the case. I intended to fit a smaller front tyre to quicken the steering but decided against it. At the start I found myself in fourth place behind Colin, Steve and Allan Oversby. Steve and I were on Molnar's, Oversby and Breeze on Summerfield machines. Andy said if I was beaten by a

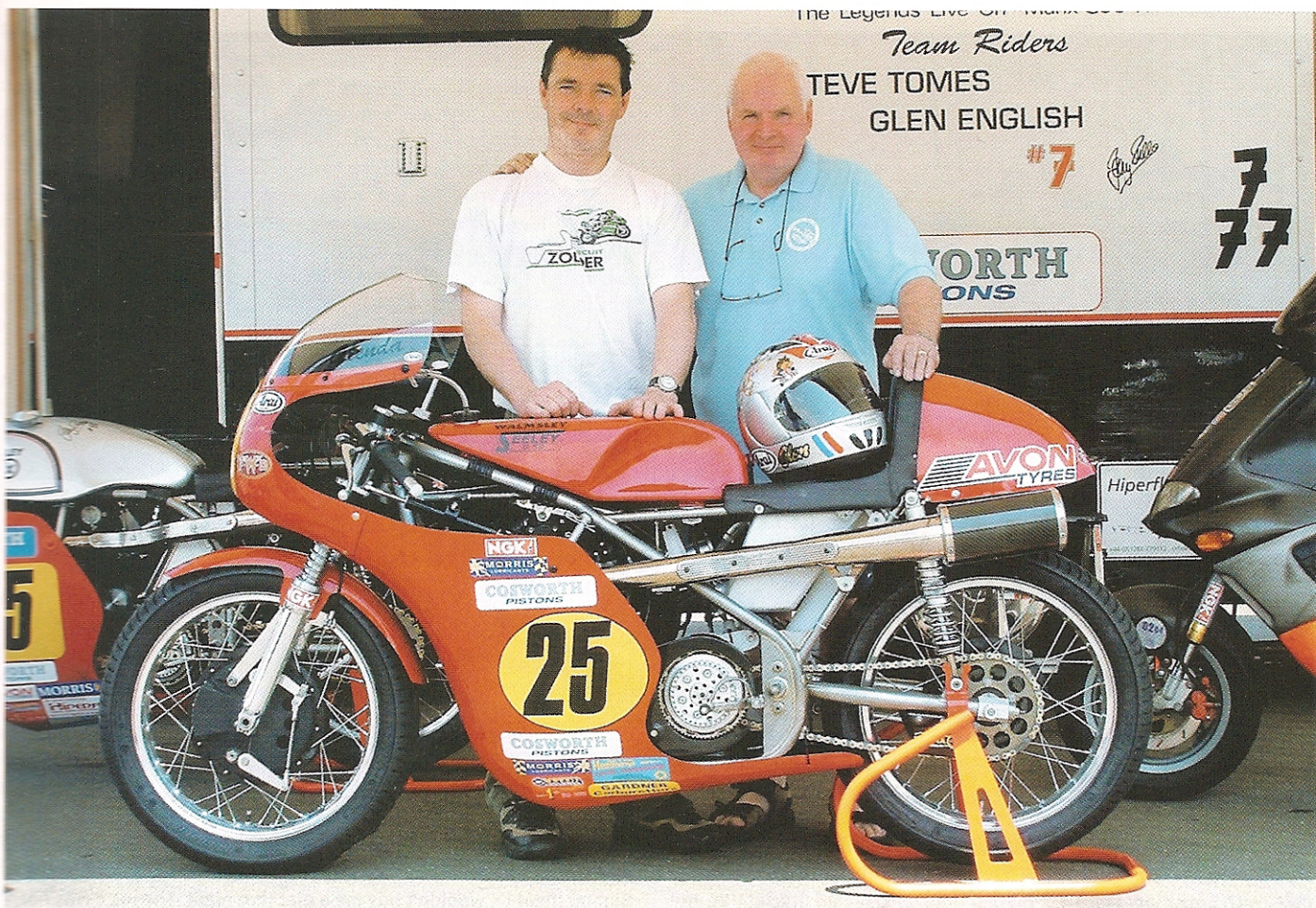
Summerfield he wouldn't buy me a pint that night. The pace was hot, I couldn't believe how hard they were going. I wished I'd gone for smaller tyre as it took time to get used to the Manx compared to the Seeley. Steve moved into the lead and pulled out a gap, I couldn't let that happen so made my move on Allan and Colin and set about Steve. I took the lead but immediately lost it again, running wide at the hairpin, the slower steering catching me out. Barry used to run the smaller tyre and commented how I managed with the big tyre, he thought it made the Manx handle like a truck. Within a couple more laps I had the measure of it, Allan was then leading but unable to pull away. Colin then had a go, the positions changed constantly. On the last lap Allan slowed and I followed Steve, who was leading. Unfortunately my brakes were burned out, such was the early pace. On the fast left hander before Mclean's I saw my opportunity and shot past Steve into the lead but I didn't have enough brakes to hold him off and he simply out braked me at Fogarty's. One more lap and I wouldn't have finished. Nevertheless it was a great race with some fine riding from Allan, Colin, and Steve, indeed it was the most enjoyable race I've had in years, and although I came second, it was more fun than my winning first race. I got fastest lap on lap ten, just a fraction slower than I had gone on the Seeley.

I'm asked which bike is best and there really isn't much in it. The Manx would be better for the Manx Grand Prix as it's good on fast corners plus it's a bigger bike and therefore more comfortable. For tighter corners the Seeley is better but they are both superb. I haven't forgotten that Molnar still owes me that pint! (*He didn't say he'd buy if you beat them, only that he wouldn't if you didn't!* – Ed)

After Donington George Beale explained that there had been a problem with the Czech round, at Most, and it had been cancelled. This meant that in the points table I was uncatchable and therefore the first ever FIM Classic World Champion.

**TOP:** Tailing some fast men, at the Melbourne loop. Allan Oversby (Craven Summerfield Norton 29), Steve Tomes (FWD Molnar Norton 27), Colin Breeze (Summerfield Petty).





#### ASSEN: FINAL ROUND

First we were noise tested, Fred had some bigger silencers as the test was more stringent than normal. Both bikes failed and we could not race unless we met the requirement. Fred told them what he thought of their meter as it was obviously wrong. Indeed, the operator didn't know how to use it until Cronshaw showed him. Everyone, bar the Dutch, who had approved silencers, failed the test.

I cut a length off the garage carpet and lock wired it up the silencer, figuring that as the bike would be running for less than 20 seconds, it should pass the test before the carpet fired. We struck it up and all was going well, until a piece of thread flapped out of the silencer. The operator looked up the silencer, saw the carpet, "No, no, go away" he said, "fail again". As I pulled away, it slipped into neutral, the revs shot up and blew out the smouldering carpet, hitting the meter man, much to the amusement of the assembled crowd.

So not only had we failed again, we'd also upset the meter man. Eventually, Fred called Stef Sindorf, who races an FWD Seeley, in Holland, and he lent us an approved silencer, which passed.

#### 1st practice

Despite being over geared I took pole. I did three laps in the second session and kept pole. With 20 minutes left, I bet Fred €5 that Adrie De Ridder would beat me. Sure enough Adrie took pole in front of an appreciative home crowd.

#### Race

On warm up Adrie struck problems, and though John and he initially led, he quickly retired. As I followed John, he was obviously playing

around, taking strange lines to let me believe I could pass him. I didn't try, until he looked down at his machine, feigning a problem.

I moved ahead but went no faster, and he was still there. Letting him through again, I almost crashed into the back of him. As we were rounding a fast right hander, he closed the throttle, a very dangerous move. I took instant evasive action, barely missed him and then nearly ran off the track.

John led on the last lap. I was right behind on the last left hander before the final chicane and went right under him to leading into the chicane. I braked later than I had done all race and just as I reached the apex, he came right underneath me. He didn't get past, but levelled and left me no room. I had to pick the bike up to avoid a collision and headed for the grass. I rode along the grass at full speed, the bike slewed sideways, but I got it back to rejoin the track and just took the win. I also did fastest lap despite my grassing.

John stated he would not lodge an official complaint about me cutting across the grass as he did not want controversy. That was good because then I didn't have to complain about his dangerous riding. Still, it made for an exciting finish to the championship.

It was a great year for me and I am very proud to be first ever FIM World Classic Champion. Of course it would not have been possible without George Beale, Tony Iddon, Roger Munsey et al. Thanks also to John, Adrie, Allan, Steve, Colin and Phill for all providing me with stiff opposition, and also to all the other competitors.

I would like to thank two special people. Colin Aldridge, my first sponsor, who got me the ride with George Beale back in 1995, and also Barry Sheene for his words of encouragement and for being everyone's friend at FWD Molnar racing.

I dedicate my championship to you both.



TOP: The inaugural world classic champions, Glen English and Fred Walmsley.