

100's MC Desert Racing Memories



I am lucky to have been around motorcycles pretty much all my life. My father, Stan Dick, had owned various street bikes when I was very young. I have fond memories of riding on the gas tank of my dad's single cylinder Jawa "bobber". And I remember him taking me out to Signal Hill near Long Beach on his Triumph Cub several times to watch the "big boy's" hill climb on their Triumphs, BSA's, and Nortons. Bikes were not new to us but desert racing was.

The 100's MC came to be in the back of BDR (Bob, Don, Ralph) motorcycles on Foothill Blvd. in Azusa. The original club name was BDRRT but formally became the 100's in '67. The first meetings were literally in the back of the motorcycle shop until moving to the Azusa Community Center. I was fourteen years old.

My father worked with Don Sillings at a pharmaceutical equipment manufacturer in Irwindale. Don had already been doing some desert racing on a Honda 90. He sold my dad a well used '65 Honda 50 with a pressed steel frame in '67 which we took out riding in the desert a few times before going to our first desert race. My father was hooked immediately and purchased a Hodaka Ace 90 Steen's Special. We were introduced to the BDRRT group and went to the first meeting where it was decided to formally start a new "District 37" motorcycle club called the 100's because everyone at that time had 100cc (or less) Hondas or Hodakas. Don Sillings was elected as the first president of the club and my dad was elected Sergeant of Arms that first year as well. The 100cc limit to club membership lasted about a year until Oscar Heintz bought a Sachs 125. After allowing 125's into the club, the DT1 Yamahas, Ossas, Bultaco Pursangs, and Huskys pretty much put an end to any hope of keeping a 125 displacement intact.

Those first desert races were very exciting events. We usually drove out to the desert on Saturday afternoon so by the time we got to the location of a race it was already dark. Very dark and the sky was huge and the stars incredibly bright. I don't ever remember seeing a shooting star until I spent the night in the desert. Saturday night camping in the desert consisted of lot's of greasewood bush fires (Sierra Club be dammed), Red Mountain wine, Coors, and of course, pot. I know we ate a lot of bar-b-que and burritos but I really don't remember any of the other food. A rite of passage for all the young to-be racers was to see how drunk you could get them (at least once) the night before a race. Walt Morrison won the most amount of times someone threw up in their sleeping bag award. Four times!! After the second sleeping bag loaned to him became unsleepable no one else would give him another sleeping bag. He ended up sleeping in a folding chair all night by the campfire with an old military blanket. Those Red Mountain gallon jugs were potent stuff.

I had my rite of passage at the '69 Elsinore Grand Prix ... Bob Roady (Rickman-Metisse Honda 90, wow!) and I had picked up on two girls in town that invited us to their parent's trailer home, and their parents were gone!! After some casual first base making out, I had to keep going outside to throw up from too much Red Mountain earlier, all the while trying to pretend nothing was wrong. The girl I was with wouldn't kiss me anymore. I guess they finally got tired of my throwing up and asked Bob and I to leave ... I don't think Bob ever forgave me for that night ... I digress.

Sunday morning ... awakening to that same guy that always blasted around the main camping area for about five minutes at 6am sharp was the start of the day. Never figured out who that was! I think he always went back to sleep after all the shouts and groans from the awakened others. That first view of the desert in the morning, the openness, large clear sky, and (former) quiet was wonderful. I never lost that excitement of seeing each new starting area the morning of a race, whether I was racing or not. Something very special about that.

At first as a spectator, a desert race was a little hard for me to visualize back then as you never saw anything but the smoke bomb start, lot's of dust, folks pitting, then it was over. What was going on out there? It was so mysterious to me before actually getting to race my first race. After the race all the rider were talking about some big sandwash, rocky downhill, or flat out fire road. And then having to wait to pick up all the folks that broke down out on the course.

Don and the other members of the 100's must have known the BDR shop was falling on hard times, which I guess is one of the reasons they moved it out to the community center in '68. Ralph McClure, one of the owners, got a distributorship for Bridgestone motorcycles in '68 but I believe he had to take out a large loan to get it. My dad bought a Bridgestone 100 (the dirt model) and raced that for about a year before giving it to me in '69 to race. Don't remember why he sold the Steen's Special, I think it was a much better desert bike.

One night in '69, Ralph left a suicide note and shot himself in the back of the shop. Sadly, I don't believe anyone was surprised. I think he was very close to bankruptcy, and I remember he always drank a lot. Mike McClure (Bob's son) and Jim Clancy tired to keep it going for a few months, but eventually had to close it down. Honda of Glendora became the bike shop hangout for the 100's after that.

I don't remember the month but the 100's put on their first 100 mile race in '68. It was in the Lucerne Valley area, and about all I remember is the start area was near a small dry lake. The course was (supposed to be) two fifty mile runs of the same loop. I know some riders were concerned they would not have enough gas to make one full loop. A lot of bikes only had 2½ gallon tanks back then. As it turns out, the loop was only a little over 36 miles but we never told anyone. I did not have much to do with the layout of the first race, but I did get to work one of the check points which was a lot fun, especially when all the novices came through.

One of the 100's races a few years later (70 or 71) was the first time I got to see JN Roberts riding up close, and I got to mark his tank card when he came in to the first check point. We could see him coming from several miles away. He already had about a two mile lead over the second place rider, Whitey Martino. And he was going

amazingly fast. When he came close to the checkpoint he slowed, casually rode in, smiled, waved hi to everyone, and casually left. Then after a few hundred yards was moving very fast again. Whitey Martino came blasting in, rear brake locked up, sideways, yelling to get his tank card checked, then off in a mad dash, destined to finish second to JN, as usual.

JN was my idol back then. Everyone thought he (and most of the Checkers) cheated, but I think he just knew the desert and how to read the terrain exceptionally well. And a lot of natural talent. He was pretty much a loner. He rarely camped with the main "Checkers MC" folks. He had this big huge faded green Dodge Power Wagon truck that he parked off by himself. He would walk over to the Checkers camp area, and socialize, but always left early and slept in the back of his truck. Everyone left him alone. He was the best and fastest rider back then. He did not race every desert race, but I think he won almost every single one he did.

The trophies were usually given out a few weeks after a race. Names were engraved on the plaques for all the riders so it could not be done at the races. This was typical of all the clubs back then. The 100's always had their trophy presentation at the Miller Beer Brewing facility in Azusa. A pretty nice area, with a small local band or a DJ to play songs. And lot's of beer!! Those were fun events All of them, the one's we put on, and the other clubs as well. The Checker's could never be topped though. One of the years they let on they would have a topless "female" dancer (the year before it was a male one) at their trophy presentation. Lot's of people came to watch whether they were getting trophies or not. And they did have one ... a 300 pound one!!

BARSTOW to VEGAS The big one every Thanksgiving weekend. An entire year of racing seemed to be waiting for that one weekend to happen. Folks that never raced before came out of the woodwork to race that one. The last year I raced it was '71 and there were over 3000 entries! Probably 2500 of them in the Novice class alone which started in the second wave. That starting line was at least one mile wide and two bikes deep! Lot's of pre-planning and organizing for the B2V. It required a lot of extra help for three gas stops between Barstow and Vegas. Nothing better than reaching the last gas stop in Baker, then flat out across the dry lake and a fairly easy run on mostly fire roads over the hills where you could finally see Vegas in the distance. I still have my finisher pins (three) from B2V which I will always treasure.

My first desert race was actually the completion of the last 2/3rds of the Barstow-Vegas for my father. He had fallen hard and separated some ribs, and I was at the first gas stop to help out pitting. I don't remember what place I finished, but I did finish and thought that was the greatest thing in the world. My next few races I raced under my dad's name because I was still too young to legally race (16) and he was still recovering from the B2V accident.

The club was growing and we started to get some pretty good riders in the group. Jerry Johnson and Larry Hearn were the first two original club members to make it to the "Amateur" class. There was Tom Jenkins (100cc Hodaka Super Rat) who eventually got tapped to go to the Four Ace's. The 100's at that time was not one of the "premier" clubs to be in. Jim Wotring (tapped to the Checkers, later), had a semi-factory sponsored Harley Baja 100 and doing great in the trailbike class, also. Jim actually beat Jack Morgan (of Hodaka fame) one race, who at the time was pretty much as unbeatable as JN Roberts. Back then there were only a handful of amateurs in each displacement

class as you only needed five transfer races to become an expert. You pretty much only had to finish five races as an amateur and you became an "Expert" class rider. By the end of '68 there were around 25 riders in the club.

I could "legally" race in '69, so after my dad bought a Yamaha DT1-B, I inherited the Bridgestone and raced that until '70 when my dad stopped racing and gave me the Yamaha.

Fond memories of the annual Four Ace's Grand Prix at Willow Springs raceway. The '70 race was the first one we started using quick dump cans. At the club meeting before the race they told us to come into the pits when signaled to do so and remove the gas cap while coming into the pit entrance. We were supposed to give it to the person on the left while pitting. In the pit my dad gave me a cup of water, then I was told to go before I could finish it. I left thinking they had not filled my gas tank. I did not see the quick fill can as it was only in for a few seconds and I was busy talking to my father. Coming around Turn 9 (we rode most of the asphalt section backwards) I pulled the cap off to verify I actually had gas.

There was the Jack Rabbits MC race which was pre-advertised as having "virgin territory". There was a sign at the entrance to the second checkpoint saying "You Are Now Entering Virgin Territory". There was a woman standing at the checkpoint wearing a white fur coat (in the desert??) which she opened when I rode past. Even at 17 years old, I didn't for a minute believe that was virgin territory, but it was trimmed into a heart shape in case you were wondering. Lots of folks taking their time at that checkpoint.

Don Sillings and I did the original layout/scouting of the 1970 100's MC 100 miler. We stumbled upon this fantastic single track downhill canyon section north of Barstow by accident. We had two choices of which canyon to go down. Both had a steep shale/gravel beginning that we would have never gotten our bikes back up. We picked the left one and it became a pretty famous downhill which had never been used in a desert race before. If we had gone right it would have been about a thirty foot sheer drop-off to get down. Larry Berquist won that race beating Rich Thornwaldson, and Whitey Martino ... a very, very hot one, too. Lots of water being given to the riders coming through the checkpoints.

I raced the 1970 Desert MC race featured in "On Any Sunday". Previous to race day we did not know it was being filmed for the movie. We did know there was going to be a helicopter used to take pictures for Life magazine. They did a full page spread of the start of the race. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I got a great start so missed having my picture in the magazine by maybe 100 feet or so. There were at least four or five 100's MC riders in that picture. I think I still have that magazine somewhere

In the movie they listed Whitey Martino as finishing first in that race. But, if I remember correctly JN Roberts actually won that race as Whitey Martino was disqualified for missing a checkpoint ... he did cheat, but not JN. If you have not seen the latest release of "The Movie" recently, there is a great aerial shot of JN going very fast across an open section of the desert. Remember, this was six inch front, four inch rear travel suspension when you see him!! Steve McQueen raced that race as well although I don't believe he was featured in the movie for that race until a new-edit of the movie was done years later.

Trivia, and I am not sure I have this right ... Who were the two 100's MC riders in "On any Sunday" in the '70 Elsinore Grand Prix. Malcom Smith was lapping just about everybody, and he went by one 100's rider that fell down and was getting ready to pass the other. I believe the one that went down was Jim Clancy, and the one in the orange Bell Star was either Tom Jenkins or Bob Roady. My dad was also in that race in 1970. My step-mother has a great picture of him in the mud hole on the first lap!!

More trivia ... Who was the 100's MC rider shown in that movie after the finish of the Desert MC race? I am pretty sure it was Tom Burroughs!

At least once a year we would organize a play weekend in the desert for the club. It was usually held at El Mirage dry lake or Red Rock Canyon. Every one that had four wheelers or dune buggies would bring those out as well as the bikes. We would have some informal competitions with prizes given away. We had slow races, elevated plank runs, trials run in the rocks, etc. And speedway and drag races on the dry lake. A great time to unwind and get to spend free (non-race) time with everyone.

My favorite desert bike I raced would have to be the DT1. I did lot's of work on that one, pictures below. Curnutt rear shocks, Flanders bars, Akront rims, Preston Petty plastic front and rear fenders, dual spark plug head. Note the custom tailored 100's MC colors seat done at Oscar Heintz's "Stylecraft" upholstery shop on Barranca. Big note on the lowered engine, about 1½ inches by cutting the frame in five places, adding spacers my dad made for me, and getting it all welded back together. This made the bike more stable in the whoops, but also a little prone to the frame hitting big boulders every now and then.



I was a volunteer on a "Rescue 3" search team looking for a lost racer the day after a desert race in '70 (yes, we found him okay). Steve Hurd (desert, enduro, and ISDT fame) was on the same six bike/one jeep team with me. After several hours of riding/searching, Steve had commented on how my Yamaha was the best running one he had ever seen. How it always started on the first kick (thanks to the dual plugs). He was also one of the few folks who had noticed the lowered frame on the DT1. It made me beam with pride!

... And that is how I will always remember desert racing and the 100's MC.

Pre-69 100's MC early members – (as many as I can remember)

Don Sillings, Don Morgan, Rich Townsend, Pete Townsend, Larry Hearn, Bob Niemen, Jim Clancy, Larry Hearn, Walt Pease, Bill Pease, Stan Dick, Bill Dick (no relation), Oscar Heintz, Jerry Johnson, Jim Clancy, Mike McClure, Bob Roady, Tom Jenkins, Verne Gregg, Tom Burroughs, Walt Morrison, Brian Bennett, Jim Wotring, and me, Paul Dick.

Pictures from the 1969 Elsinore Grand Prix:



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4

Picture 1 - L-R: Don Morgan(?), Rich Townsend, Larry Hearn (fast), Stan Dick (my late father), Bob Niemen

Picture 2 - L-R: Jim Clancy (back), Larry Hearn (still fast), Walt Pease, Bill Dick (no relation), Oscar Heintz (in front on Sachs)

Picture 3 - L-R: Jerry Johnson (very fast), Pete Townsend, Jim Clancy (sitting)

Picture 4 - Me on a Bridgestone 100 (16 years old)

Sincerely,
Paul H. Dick
San Jose, CA