

The Teagle Story

by Ray Pratley

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It all began in the early fifties. Two young Italians had ridden pedal cycles, with 50cc motors bolted to the cycles over the rear wheels, from Italy to England. Very soon these 'clip-on' motors were on the British market, made under licence by Trojan, the original 'clip-on' motor in this country - the Mini-Motor.

At that time I had been a motor cyclist for 20 years and a cyclist for longer than that, and the two pastimes had never mixed. The cyclemotor movement was under way and combined both, so I acquired a Mini-Motor and was amazed at the pleasure it gave me. Clubs were formed up and down the country, notable among these being the cyclemotor section of the British Two-Stroke Club. The cycling movement as a whole hated the new contraptions. The National Cyclists Union and the Cycle Touring Club were refusing to have anything to do with them. The Veteran Cyclists Association would though and, at my suggestion, opened their ranks to the 50cc motor. I was at once able to form the Nottinghamshire Cyclemotor Club, with the help of new found friends, on behalf of the VCA. So we came to the very wet Summer of 1954 and two road trials, wonderful but wet club runs each Sunday and Honorary Life Membership of the VCA for the writer.

The end of the summer came and, at a special meeting, the club decided to break from the VCA. I, as secretary, had instructions to write to the Auto-Cycle Union and the British Two-Stroke Club. The ACU were thought to be too demanding in their reply; the BTSC did not reply. This was no fault of the club though. At the time the Notts Cyclemotor Club was breaking away from the VCA, the cyclemotor section was doing exactly the same with the BTSC. The BTSC, honest types that they were, forwarded the Notts letter to their former section, which at once became the 'Half Hundred Club'. The Notts club remained independent.

Vice-Chairman of the club, Mr Jack Jebson, who had perhaps done more than anyone else to get the club going was a trials organiser supreme. He had more National Rally experience than anyone else I knew - both pre-war and post-war on solo motor cycles, sidecar combinations and motorised pedal cycles. He had led a team of 38cc Mosquito engined cycles on a trials sortie into Yorkshire and gained the first three places. He had also ridden in the ACU cyclemotor demonstration trials which were organised by the BTSC, club member Ray Cawse being the prime mover.

About this time I decided that I should have a new motor. The Mini Motor was a good motor, but had its faults. It was heavy (26lbs) and was prone, like so many pre-war motors, to overheat and stop. Jack Jebson had had a prototype cyclemotor in his shop for some time and it seemed to be just the job for me.

It was completely British, which my new motor had to be. It was light (15lbs). It had been tried over the years on agricultural machinery and also the price was right. I obtained my new Teagle soon after they came on the market, which was at the end of the aforementioned very wet summer. My wonderful Teagle! I often said afterwards that I live in the industrial Midlands, but I had to go to rural Cornwall for my motor. "British designed and British built throughout" and "The most advanced and simplest two stroke made". These were Teagle slogans, together with, "The world's finest cyclemotor at the world's lowest price". All Teagle's claims were to be proved true. Later they were able to say, "thousands sold and we never made a charge for repair". Like the motor, the Teagle service was unique. One couldn't get spares from the agent; the drill was to parcel the motor up and post it to the

factory. One would get it back by return of post, always within a few days. Reconditioned units were available for a maximum of £4. Letters were now flowing in a steady stream to *Power and Pedal*, praising the Teagle and, in particular, the service. One owner wrote that he “couldn’t have wished for as good a service, had he bought the most expensive car in the world” (whichever one that was at the time).

The Teagle is a 49cc ‘square’ motor (equal bore and stroke) bench tested to a maximum of 9,200 revs per minute. It is an all alloy motor, the only one made with cylinder, crankcase and outrigger bearing bracket as a monoblock casting. The cylinder and crankcase being in one, there is a door in the crankcase to enable the extraction of the innards. Publicity of the Teagle in club trials brought the writer many letters from owners, including one from a German who hoped to tour Europe on his Teagle equipped tandem.

A cylemotor race meeting was planned to be held on a circuit in Nottingham Forest; Messrs Teagle offered, through, the Nottingham agent, to exchange my motor for a new one, or to send a mechanic to service my motor. The meeting was cancelled, owing to the heavy insurance premium required for third party cover; the forest being a public park this was required.

Came the 1956 National Rally and a ride on a 98cc New Hudson loaned from Alan Davies to keep up easily with Les Jones on his Ducati. The Ducati clip-on was the only four-stroke to be admitted to the British Two-Stroke Club. Just after dawn on Sunday, the Ducati gave up the ghost five miles outside York and Jack Jebson was roused from his bed by the ringing of his phone bell. Back into York rather slowly with the Ducati on the end of a tow-rope and out on the road towards Selby. A roadside seat invited us to stop a while, then a few more miles before we met Jack, coming to collect us. The Ducati was tied on the back of the car, a brew up at the roadside and some welcome sandwiches brought by Jack, and we were on our way back to Nottingham, Les and I taking it in turns to ride the New Hudson and ride in the car.

There was no National Rally in 1957 (petrol rationing), but a trip in the first ‘Scoot to Scotland’ as a passenger to Keith Coleman, Les bringing up the rear on his newly acquired scooter. By now the Teagle was a veteran of a number of trials and so the time went by until the 1958 National Rally. This year I was Teagle mounted, the only 50cc entrant in the whole event. My ambition was to be the first 50 to win an award since the minimum marks were raised from 150 to 300. There was, of course, a Nottingham control in those days. This was my starting point and so to Derby, then roughly South West most of the way. Bags of encouragement at the controls, such as: “you deserve a medal as big as Big Ben” and “We heard that you were coming”. These were amongst the remarks, which were all very nice, but I didn’t have time to stop for a natter. At Stroud, it was getting dark then, after a drink and a bite to eat, I discovered that there were no lights. Two hours were lost here before setting off for Bath.

Coincidentally, Les Jones also lost about two hours, but at Coventry. I continued with a cycle lamp at the front and a borrowed torch at the rear and it was on this road that I mistook a truss of hay for a drunk or dead bloke. At Shepton Mallett I was advised to go a certain way. “I wouldn’t go the other way, there’s still a bloke missing from the last National” said my informant. At Yeovil the Teagle was heartily clapped into the control by a large number of competitors and spectators. It was now twenty minutes to nine, with twenty-eight miles to Weymouth and the final control. On this last lap, a steady stream of competitors passed me, all sounding their horns, giving a friendly wave, or a thumbs-up sign - the only competitor who went by without a wave was a lone scooter rider. A few miles short of Weymouth I realised that I would have to have petrol to be certain of reaching the finish on time. Time had got too short to risk running out between controls, so I pulled into the first filling station for a half-gallon, which would take me 110 miles or so. On seeing the National Rally number, the chap rushed out from the midst of shaving, his face covered in soap and blood from several cuts. Just after

handing my control card in, I bumped into Les Jones, who had come down on his Diana scooter having left Nottingham at 8:00 on Saturday after a hard day's work. A certificate of merit had been won with 309 marks, the highest ever obtained in a National Rally by a production cyclemotor. This still stands today (1965).

After a hearty Lucas breakfast, Les and I turned our wheels North. A few miles out of Weymouth a refreshment van called a halt and over a cup of tea we wrote our route home on two scraps of paper. Les, having to be at work on Monday, pushed on. I followed at cyclemotor speed. Nearing Andover the bike was dropping from under me every few hundred yards—a sure sign that I was nearly asleep. I found a bed and breakfast place and was in bed by 8:00pm. After 12 hours solid sleep and a light breakfast, I collected the bike from a shed at the rear of the house and topped the rear tyre up; a pressure of 50-55lbs is required for maximum roller drive. Leaving Andover the Teagle buzzed and screamed its way through Newbury, Oxford, Banbury, Southam, Rugby, Leicester and Loughborough to give one of the best cyclemotor rides I've ever had; home and another National Rally was over. Well not quite - being on holiday, I reported to Jack Jebson on the Tuesday and he thought that immediate action was the order of the day. He at once phoned Harold Savage, Chairman of the club, and later President, and they both sent a letter to the ACU asking for a 50cc class in future events, or rather National Rallies. Copies were sent to the East Midlands Centre. The *Nottingham Evening Post* gave about six column inches to the ride and a letter was published in *Power and Pedal* from a National Rally competitor asking for a 50cc class in view of the “sporting Teagle ride”.

For the previous 15 months or so the club had been far from active. The moped had arrived and the riders were of a different type to the cyclemotor lads. The club was being held together by nine members who held quarterly meetings. Other clubs were folding up and from the Notts club had gone a whole host of stalwarts: Les Jones (later to become Vice President of the British Two-Stroke club), who had been mostly unlucky in trials, although strangely it always went well on the Sunday club runs; Eric Holmes, who had won the first two trials hands down; Ken Price, who on a night trial had put paraffin in his tank instead of petrol, pedalled 12 miles to the next check and still won the event; Peter LeGrande, who was really keen and gave us many a good laugh; David Buckland, who was so keen that he once turned up for a night trial a week early; Jack Ganley, who on one of the ACU demonstration trials, told Professor A M Low that his timing equipment was wrong and that his own wrist watch was right; Ray Richardson, who decoked and polished the ports on his Power Pak prior to each club run; Ben Draycott, a keen club man with whom Alan Davies and I had many a grand pint. These and many others had left the club as the cyclemotor boom waned: some going to scooters, some to motor cycles and a few to cars. During this inactive period in the life of the Notts Cyclemotor Club it was proposed, at one of the quarterly meetings, that the club should open its ranks to scooters. At the time I was all for it, anything to get the club going again, but Jack Jebson was against this. After an evening-long talk it was decided against the scooter. Les Jones, Keith Coleman, Alan Davies, David Buckland and I talked of forming an under 250cc club whilst there was little cyclemotor activity. Keith, Les and I decided to get things moving. David had gone into the Army and Alan was not interested. As a scooter club it was a success from the start and is, I believe, still prosperous today. After a year as publicity officer I dropped out. As Alan had said, it was not the club for us. I was thankful that some of those types had not been admitted to the cyclemotor club. I know that Les, who is a keen scooterist himself, understands.

Now to get back to the real stuff. It was almost five years since the cyclemotor club had been formed and I suggested a Fifth Anniversary run. This was given some publicity in the local papers and, if I remember correctly, 15 non-members turned up on Mk 1 Raleigh mopeds, which were just coming onto the road in large numbers. They all joined the club. Harold Savage, Alan Davies and I went, plus Des Bone who rode a racing Itom. I left the Teagle at home and rode the Norman, which some BTSC members will remember, so that I could take my son Ken along. Altogether it was a record turn out and the club was active again. After several well attended club runs, Harold Savage put on a trial,

which had a record entry. The Teagle won, a new lad was second and Alan Davies was third. Over a quiet pint after the finish Alan said jokingly that it would look like a wangle with the two of us finishing first and third. I could only reply that there would have been something wrong if we hadn't finished in the first three on a Teagle and a Villiers.

The Raleigh mopeds had come onto the roads in large numbers and the Raleigh factory held a service week in Nottingham. For this they took over part of a large car showroom. There were moped rides on the roof and much publicity. Through the good offices of Harold Savage, Messrs Raleigh kindly gave the Notts Cyclemotor Club space. They put a table and several chairs at our disposal and we showed the club cups, trophies and the Teagle's National Rally numbers with mileage, etc, on the card. On the front of the table we had a large club badge with a cycle tyre as the outer edge. Nottingham Forest had just won the FA cup and the service week was opened by Jack Burkitt, the Forest captain, and Reg Harris, the great sprint cyclist. We gained a number of new members that week.

Now to another National Rally: it was the Yarmouth year. Twelve members wanted regs, but when they saw that they would have to enter the 125cc class, they were not interested. Four of us did enter. Two were not very serious and rode round a few controls during the day and went home at night. John, the lad who had been second in the recent trial, and I rode together. He was on a two-speed moped and the Teagle went like the clappers all day to keep up with him at bronze plaque speed. It was a grand moonlit night, the lightest and warmest I have known on a National Rally. I should have got petrol at Boston, but didn't and at Spalding I found that didn't have enough to get to the next control, so went back to Boston (only 15 miles) and refuelled. With extra miles done and time lost, I had no guts to carry on, so turned the Teagle towards Nottingham *via* Grantham. I pulled up at home at 7:00am to hear the kettle whistling ready for a cup of tea. In view of the Teagle's performance the previous year, the ACU had put up the AJW award for the best performance. This was won by a trade supported rider on a foreign moped.

In mentioning the revival of the cyclemotor club, *Power and Pedal* had said, "The Secretary is 50cc pioneer Ray Pratley who gained fame in the National Rally riding a Teagle". The revival had slowed down by now and a fifty miles trial attracted only five entries, perhaps because the only awards were certificates. There were two Teagles in this event: John Proudfoot having acquired one, a partnership which was to be very short-lived. John said that he had covered most of the course with only half a carburettor - actually he had lost his air filter. We all collected first class certificates. Alan Taylor joined the club at about this time and he was to ride in the next National Rally, the venue of which was Belle Vue. He and Pat Wright (later Mrs Taylor) rode mopeds and I rode the Teagle alone. I spent most of the day riding round the Lincolnshire controls and came across Alan and Pat at Horncastle and at Spalding. On the way from Grantham to Derby I was due to meet the family at Wollaton Park Gates at 8:15pm and I arrived at 8:20, only 5 minutes down on time. I had travelled light all day and, after coffee and sandwiches, I donned warmer clothing and exchanged shoes for boots. With a final promise to meet at Belle Vue in the morning I set off again. All went well through the night: while competitors further south had been riding in rain, I was still dry. At Nantwich it was getting light as I left the control. A few miles along the road towards Chester, down came the rain and with it trouble for me: roller slip - the curse of clip-ons. I pulled up to adjust the clutch. The Teagle, when fitted to a cycle correctly, has no roller slip, but it must be spot on and can only be found by trial and error. The slightest movement for pedal chain adjustment and all is lost; one has to start again. On this now very wet morning I just could not get it right. I tried everything, pulling the nipple off the cable in the process. I fitted the spare, made further adjustments and still no joy; that was it; with a motor that would go like a bomb, I was stuck with no drive. The family was going to be at Belle Vue, so I had to get there. I started walking...

Had I known how far I was to walk, I wonder if I would have started; I walked a full 12 miles to Chester. I just kept going; I was so tired and stiff that when I got to the only decent hill in my favour it

was easier to keep walking than to get on the bike and coast down. I know; I tried. In Chester I caught the first train to Manchester and was soon asleep, until the Guard woke me. Would I come to his van as there was petrol dripping onto his floor? In Manchester I left the bike at the station and caught a bus to Belle Vue, arriving much too late for the last but one Lucas breakfast. I found the family with Alan and Pat, who had got in for a 'bronze' and were still drying out. After a visit to a cafe just outside Belle Vue, we made our way back to the station. The family had come on the bus and had return tickets. The Teagle had to be taken back to Nottingham on the train. So that I would not oversleep on the train and miss the Midland station, Ken returned by train and I went on the bus. A day or so later, having fully recovered, I had a look at the bike. Two minutes work with a hacksaw, on the end of a stud which fouled the full movement of the clutch, and the drive was perfect.

Several weeks had passed since the 1960 Belle Vue National Rally. The Nottinghamshire Cyclemotor Club was slowly grinding to a halt; all the other clubs had, in fact, ceased to exist. We were still getting the odd new member, but most of the Raleigh riders were going in for something else. The days when a club run was stopped by 'clip-on' riders, wanting to join, saying, "I read about you in *Power and Pedal* magazine" were gone for good. By now that magazine was nearly full of scooter copy. An eventful year was ahead though. A chap who lived nearby had bought a Teagle way back in 1954, after seeing mine perform. He now called round to see if I would like to buy it, as he was buying a car. The timing was perfect, as Ken would be 16 at Christmas. We fitted the motor to a bike and he rode it several times up and down a private lane, after getting permission. On his birthday Ken was out on the road before breakfast.

Came the Spring and talk of the club folding up. In February a certain Francis Barnett arrived and Ken passed his test on it, having ridden at the most 200 miles on it. Early summer and it was time to think about preparing the two Teagles for the Weston-Super-Mare National Rally. Ken sent his motor to Teagle for an overhaul and it returned, as usual, within a few days. He obtained a pair of Alpha forks from Jack Jebson and fitted them to the bike, together with a moped saddle and wide bars. For the previous two Nationals my bike had been fitted with wide bars, moped saddle and Webb forks, all ex-Pete LeGrande. On the Weymouth National Rally I had lost nearly a stone in weight, so the small hard cycle saddle and solid forks had to go. Both Teagles were fitted with Britax cyclemotor twistgrips. These are well worth having. No nipple is needed at the twistgrip end of the cable as the cable is tightened in the grip by a grub screw. These grips make a very useful spare to carry on any motor cycle, they fit any seven-eighth inch bars and, if the throttle cable breaks at the grip, as most seem to do, or the nipple pulls off just shorten the outer cable and replace the normal twistgrip with the Britax one. Quicker than changing the cable and better than a solderless nipple.

One good thing about the Quarter Litre Club was that it brought Les back into the fold and he was to ride with us on a Mk 1 Raleigh. It was dry when we started, but we hadn't covered many miles when it started to rain and continued until late afternoon. We were going pretty well and running to time. Ken ran out of petrol long before he was due to need it. I had always obtained 220mpg and he only got 160, no doubt due in the main to a different carb needle setting. It was getting dark as we drank the flask of coffee that Les had brought with him. We were to see him only once more during the event. The Raleigh being chain driven was a shade faster than the Teagles. It would slowly draw away, perhaps something like a thousand yards an hour. As we were going into the Stroud control about midnight Les was leading and that was the last we saw of him. At Bristol they told us that he had gone through, but that his motor didn't sound too healthy as he left.

After dawn heavy rain slowed us down as we were climbing the Mendips. (Les commented later that *he* thought it was Mount Everest.) At Shepton Mallett one of the blokes asked how we were going, saying, "I remember you in the Weymouth rally, you did well then". We had two more controls to call at, Taunton and Bridgwater, before Weston, and time was running out as it so often does before the end of a National Rally. At Glastonbury we decided to miss these two controls and make straight for

the finish. Better to finish short of 300 marks than to not arrive at all, or at the best late. We got into the finish on the front at Weston with about 15 minutes to spare. Having found a spot to stand the Teagles, our photo was taken with the machines by *Motor Cycling* magazine and this appeared in the next issue with the National Rally report. On the opposite page was a photo of someone all BTSC members know well: Margaret Collins.

After a hearty Lucas breakfast, which was to be the last kindly meal provided by that firm, we returned to the bikes. We got talking to another competitor, who was full of moans about the National Rally. After listening to him for some time, he said "Well cheerio, see you next year". Still, that is the National Rally, once it gets you, you turn up for more year after year. We didn't wait for the results but mounted the bikes again and headed South for a dozen miles to Burnham-on-Sea to stop the night. After finding somewhere to stay and putting the bikes away, we went for a stroll. In the Manor gardens I met the father of a school friend who I had last seen in 1940. Later, walking along the beach as the tide came in, I thought the sea water would be just the job for feet which had been enclosed in shoes and socks for 36 hours, plus being wet through and drying out again twice, so I had a paddle, much to Ken's amusement. After a snack and a cup of tea we were in bed by 8:00pm, where we slept very soundly until 8:15 the next morning, when we were brought a very welcome cup of tea.

Down to breakfast in the dining room by the open French windows. The strong wind of the previous day had gone and it was a glorious morning. The owner of the boarding house was interested in the Teagles and sat with us and talked about them and 'clip-ons' in general. It was 10:20 when we left Burnham, with a long haul ahead out onto the A38 and then due north to Bristol. Redhill brought us to a halt and gave us a good walk. After Bristol, Gloucester, Cheltenham and then Cleve Hill and a longer walk than the previous one. It was very hot by now and the view was a good excuse to stop and rest several times. On to Stratford, Warwick, Coventry, Leicester, Loughborough and home. By now it was about bedtime and we were ready; it was work the next day. On Wednesday morning *Motor Cycle News* told us that we had won the AJW award for 'the best 50cc performance'. We had wondered what had happened to Les and on Wednesday he came up, just got back into Nottingham by train, after having being discharged from Taunton hospital that morning.

Les Jones takes up the story at this point: *Yes, I certainly came a cropper that Sunday morning. It was about 3:45 and I had left the Shepton Mallet control some miles behind and was glad that hills were now behind me and not in front when, for no apparent reason, the Raleigh came to an abrupt halt, putting me on the road in the process. I picked myself up and manhandled the bike to the side of the road. After all there were other rally riders, some travelling three times my modest 25 per. It was about this time that I discovered that I had a cut above my right eye, nothing serious, but it was to need hospital treatment. I set out to walk to a nearby hospital and found that I had twisted my ankle as well. Quite suddenly, as if from nowhere, appeared a large lorry, which stopped and took me, and the bike as well, into Taunton hospital, where the driver saw me into the casualty department, then left without leaving his name or address, or any particulars of himself. I learned later that he had gone ten miles or more out of his way - a true gentleman if ever there was one.*

To return to the Teagle story however - on the first Sunday after the National Rally, at a meeting of the Quarter Litre Club, it was decided that Ken should be given an award for winning the AJW award. On the following Sunday we went on a club run to Clumber Park and that is the very last time my Teagle was ridden. Ken used his once more to good effect.

In August the Notts and District Motor Cycle Club put on a road safety rally in conjunction with the Police. Ken entered on the Teagle and won the 50cc class and a very fine cup, standing some fifteen inches high. So the Teagles came to a halt. They had been run in competitions long after the cylemotor movement had finished. It was now 1961 and they were more obsolete than many Vintage and Veteran motor cycles. At the 1966 Rempstone Rally, Ken entered the Scott and I took the Teagle in a van; it earned a plaque, along with all the other entries. It created a great amount of interest, more

than most of the other bikes and I was kept busy answering questions. However the place for a Teagle is not at a static display, but up the road, passing workmen cutting hedges with Teagle powered cutters. Whilst on holiday in 1966, I saw a 7 to 8 foot log which had been washed up onto the beach. Workmen came to saw it up into short lengths with a Teagle powered saw. So this wonderful motor which never lets one down is still being made, nor are they forgotten. In the 1966 National Rally, on pulling into the Boston control on the Barnett, one of the chaps manning the control said, "I remember you on the Teagle". This was five years after. In the advert of a well-known oil company, a cyclemotor was shown, obviously a Teagle.

So this rather rambling story comes to an end, but I hope interesting. Since starting the last chapter of this story, Ken and I have decided to ride the Teagles in the 1967 National Rally. He could go on the Scott, have a comfortable ride, earn a 'gold' and most likely carry off the vintage award in the process. Ken's love of Scotts is well known, but he prefers the challenge of riding a pedal cycle fitted with the Teagle, the motor that will keep going if the rider can do the same. So once again the Teagles will buzz and scream along the roads, once again there will be the stench of a hot two-stroke motor, petrol and very hot rubber, and the world will be alright, but more of that anon - the Teagle story is not finished yet.