

Colombres 2018

This tale was never intended for MZ Rider as my intention was to take my Velocette Venom for its 3rd trip to the Colombres rally in Spain in October 2018. However, my attempts at improving the Venom with a new carburettor turned to worms and with a few days to go it became apparent that I would have to choose another bike. It was a case of Hobson's choice really. Though I have several other bikes on the road, the rally cut-off date and more particularly the size of the bike (space was limited in the van) meant it had to be my 1974 TS250. This bike has been a reliable runner for over 2yrs having been built originally from parts scavenged from the Whitminster Hoard (see issue 225 of MZ Rider). It needed a rack and top box both of which were to hand but the front brake was also a concern. The mountain roads in Spain can be very steep and full of tight hairpins. Though the TS250 front brake was ok for normal UK pottering, I have memories of a buttock clenching descent of Porlock on my Supa5 which caused me to fit it with a Honda 2LS brake. As I had another Honda hub laced into an MZ rim in the shed, I decided with only two days to go to make the change.

Normally this is a pretty simple job involving swapping the fork legs (Unless you want a twin trailing shoe brake – not recommended). However the TS250 had its original 32mm forks which don't offer any suitable mounting for the brake torque arm even if switched. However, I had a pair of later fork legs and 35mm yokes so with a day to go I started the job. All went well until I got to the headlight mounting; the TS250 type are slimmer and the support rubbers don't fit. A search found a set of the 35mm type which thankfully were the right colour and some new mounting rubbers. Then I found the mudguard I had set aside for this task was still in primer so work stopped whilst it was painted and allowed to dry. Final hurdle was the front brake cable but fortunately I found a spare made up



for my Supa5 conversion years ago. Inevitably the whole job took twice as long as I expected. The front wheel had been built with a larger rim from an ETZ250 back wheel for use in a sidecar project and the steering was a bit slow with the larger front tyre but perfectly acceptable, thank goodness.

Preparation then turned to fitting out the top box with oil, tools and various spares (cables, levers, bulbs, inner tubes and suchlike). One drawback to swapping the front wheel was the need for an 18" as

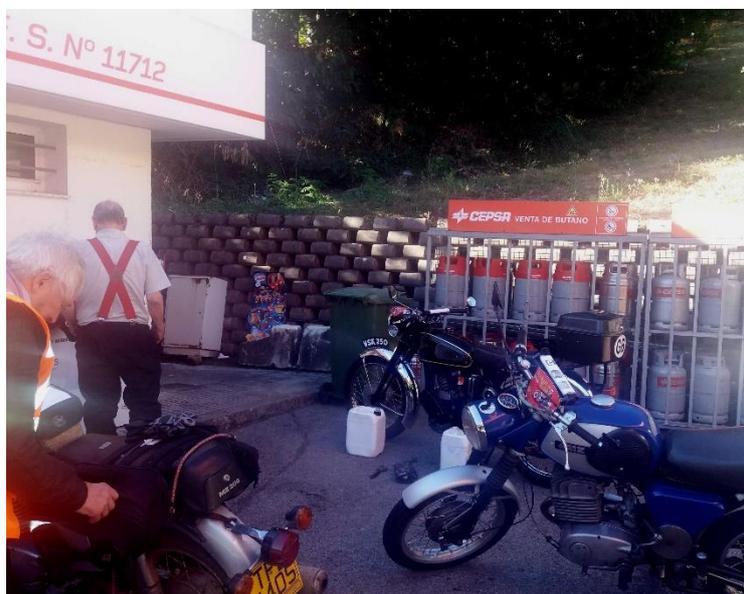
well as a 16" inner tube but a small price to pay for a better brake. So with a day to spare we were set to go. The eagle eyed may note the security chain wrapped round the headstock to try and keep some weight forward. MZs with loaded back boxes are notoriously light on the steering in my experience. The photo was taken just before we loaded the van

A bit about the Colombres rally itself. We first went in 2015 all three riding Supa5s. We thoroughly enjoyed the event (see MZ Rider 219) such that we went back in 2016 and 2017 but this time riding Velocettes. The main event is based on Colombres Village. The participants select from a range of hotels in the area with ride outs from Monday to Sunday typically 120-160 miles starting and finishing at Colombres square. A buffet lunch is included in the rally fee. Last year they preceded the rally with a 5 day touring holiday which we also entered. The word touring is a bit of a misnomer as

you ride circa 150 miles west and are then based at a hotel from which daily ride outs are arranged and of course a new area to explore. In total we did about 1300 miles in 2017 and found the 'touring' element the most enjoyable part. Two weeks was just a bit too long and we rather envied some friends who went home on the Wednesday. All entrants being based at the same hotel and the smaller numbers (limited to about 75) made for a more relaxed atmosphere. So for 2018 we booked just for the touring holiday which meant we sailed out from Plymouth to Santander on Sunday 30th September and returned on Monday 8th October. I know we will be classed as wimps but we take the 3 bikes and our luggage in a van. This offers a number of benefits not least being significantly cheaper than booking 3 bikes and riders; the ferry cost is discounted once you have entered the rally by the way. Our departure to Plymouth was somewhat delayed on the Sunday morning and we eventually arrived just before the last check in time. This did have one benefit as we were loaded straight away and for some reason finished up near the front so that we made a sharp exit in Santander. However, the stress on the nerves (not to mention the astronomical fuel consumption for the van) meant we won't try that trick again.

The ferry arrived on Monday and the tour does not start until the Tuesday so we checked into our favourite hotel, the Mirador de La Franca for one night – same room 4 years running. The organisers provide a van to carry the luggage so suitcases were left in hotel reception and an overnight bag sufficed which was left in our van on Tuesday morning. We unloaded the bikes and rode into Colombres to the tourist office where we paid our dues and collected the route cards plus the all important rally badge to be displayed on the bike. Mike was riding his Venom, Bill also had trouble with his Velo so was Supa5 mounted. Looking round the square in Columbres on Tuesday morning we saw many bikes and people we knew from previous years. The weather was warm and dry which contrasted with the steady drizzle we endured in 2017. Our destination was a Parador in Cangas de Narcia about 155 miles to the south west of Colombres. In practise it was not far from last year's venue at Tineo so we recognised much of the route and used some of the same cafes as last year.

The ride was pleasant enough and the last 30 miles are on a magnificent road alongside the Narcia river with sweeping bends and fairly level so the bikes hummed along happily at 55 or so. We stopped for fuel about 5 miles short of Cangas where Mike proceeded to fill his Velo with diesel. With the aid of a very helpful pump attendant we drained the tank and refilled with 98 Octane. As Mike had not turned on the fuel nor started the bike there was no real issue though there was the odd aroma of diesel for a couple of days. As far as we can tell they did not even charge him for the wasted diesel.



Needless to say we were the last to arrive but even with numerous coffee stops and the diesel incident we were there by 4:30pm. Paradors incidentally are buildings in Spain of historical interest but no longer viable in their original role. Many are refurbished at Government expense as hotels. Ours was a former monastery and was of 5 star standard. It had a huge swimming pool and a

museum in the basement; the rooms were enormous and very well equipped. The riders in the picture are all wearing the red event polo shirt ready for a group photo shoot.



The route for Wednesday took us in a loop north west to the coast where we visited the resort of Lluçma amongst other places. It was just after leaving the lunch stop that I had my incident. I spotted a turn too late, braked hard and hit a patch of gravel. I am told by those following that it looked horrific as I grazed the road sign before the bike laid down. Amazingly the MZ survived with only a bent headlight rim; not even a broken lens. My injuries were mainly to my pride plus some bruised ribs. When I got my breath back I took the bike for a gentle spin down the road and it seemed to steer and handle ok apart from the headlight pointing somewhat to the right. Since we were riding on the right it was not really a problem. As you can imagine, I rode at a very sedate pace for the next couple of days watching eagle eyed for any signs of gravel on bends. I was lucky it could have been far worse and the blame lies entirely with me. Subsequent routes explored the mountainous interior. Both MZs averaged over 80mpg throughout the week; creditable given the amount of 3rd & 4th gear work need to climb the frequent steep hills - though we did get a free ride down the other side.

The routes for 2018 were predominantly new to us though if we went to the north closer to Tineo we did recognise some familiar places. This part of Spain is not so touristy as the Pecos which meant it was harder to find open Tavernas and many of the roads were less well maintained than we had been used to, especially high up in the mountains. We spoke to Danny, one of the organising team who had prepared many of the route cards and were told that it was the intention to get us into places rarely visited but offering spectacular scenery. They certainly achieved the latter. Hairpin

bends apart most of the roads were no worse than the backroads in the UK though for the first time in 4 years we actually encountered pot holes. The bikes are pictured at the top of one mountain pass circa 4000ft – you can see the snow poles in the background. Despite the clear blue skies and the 27°C temperature that day, within a few weeks this road is likely to be impassable. The highest point we know we reached was just under 5000ft.



The weather was superb until the Friday when we did get some rain for a short time. We had already decided to skip the ride on Saturday as it was rather

long route going over much ground we had already covered. A good decision as it rained very hard most of the day so we sent a very enjoyable time in a nearby Taverna enjoying coffee, beer and a seemingly unlimited supply of tapas all for less than one round of beers would have cost in the Parador. Those who did ride the route came back dripping – not good considering we had a 155 mile ride back to Colombres on the Sunday.

The ride back started overcast and we had some rain for a while but soon dried off; eventually it turned into a sunny afternoon. The route card as always was excellent and we made good time, covering the 100 miles to the lunch stop at Rodiles in about 3 hours – Lovely spot right on a surfing beach. We started off ahead of the pack and it was only when we stopped for coffee at around 75 miles that anyone passed us. The MZs were amongst the smallest bikes in the event most entrants were riding much bigger bikes, BMW boxer twins accounted for about half the entry. Some rode



harder than was prudent and it seems I was not the only one who had an off. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt though a few bikes came back on the recovery truck. The last 50 miles passed very quickly an all too soon we were back at the Mirador for our last night and a chance to relax with a beer on the patio. The bikes and our riding gear were all packed in the van along with the suitcases. These had been brought back by the organisers and were waiting for us when we arrived. Fantastic service. It would have

been nice to have taken the Velo but in truth the MZs did everything asked of them over 750 miles. They with the terrain admirably and we did not put a spanner on them all week, my incident apart..

They really are remarkable bikes especially when you watched the amount of spannering being done on bigger and more expensive bikes in the car park of an evening.

The overall organisation of this event is excellent. Though it is no longer a cheap holiday, it does still offer superb value for money and a wonderful riding experience. We did have slight withdrawal symptoms as we left on Monday morning knowing those remaining had another week's riding but for us geriatrics it was undoubtedly the right decision.



In Colombres Square ready for the start



Some of the other entrants waiting for the start



Picturesque Fishing village or Luarca



Our lunch stop on the Thursday



Somewhere in the Mountains



Our Hotel in Cangas – the Parador Nacional de Corias This is only one ¼ of the building – it's huge



More spectacular scenery



Looking for bears! None to be found this day