

## Colombres Rally – 2015

I have known for a long time that there was a rally based in Northern Spain in early October every year. Many people have told me how good it is and in late 2014 an article appeared in the VMCC journal about just such an event which wetted the appetites of myself and a few friends. Delving briefly into history, it seems that the original event was called the Moto-Piston rally which was at that time based in the village of Colombres about 70kms south of Santander and was targeted at classic bikes. It proved very successful and eventually outgrew the accommodation available around Colombres in part because more modern bikes were allowed. Eventually the Moto-Piston rally moved to a large hotel in Santander and continues on that basis to this day. In 2011 a small club called MC Indianos decided to resurrect the event under its original theme of classic bikes and based once again in Colombres. It was timed to run immediately after the Moto-Piston rally but does have an age limit (1988 or earlier this year) and it was this event which Mike, Bill and myself decided to enter in 2015.

A small selection of pictures can be viewed by clicking this link [Colombres 2015 Pictures](#) or you can click on the link below to view more pictures on dropbox:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/utibdisli4v1mem/AAB0tYzlzs3AKKaMG6mvqkcHa?dl=0>

We sent off for details around December 2014 and received a comprehensive and initially baffling entry form to complete. There is a choice of taking part for 4 days or the whole 7 days (at 55 or 70 Euros) and a list of hotels with prices and tick boxes to show which was required and for what nights. Mike and I did some research into the hotels on the internet and agreed our preferences (you have to give a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choice) and duly sent off the entry forms for the full 7 days. No money was required, indeed we did not pay anything to MC Indianos until we actually arrived in Colombres. In mid-January we received the discount code and studied the ferry schedules to discover that we would have to amend our hotel bookings as we would arrive and leave a day later than originally planned. We submitted revised entry forms and these were accepted without issue. We had already decided to take the bikes over in a van as this was cheaper and more practical than riding all the way – a good decision as it turned out. So far so good.

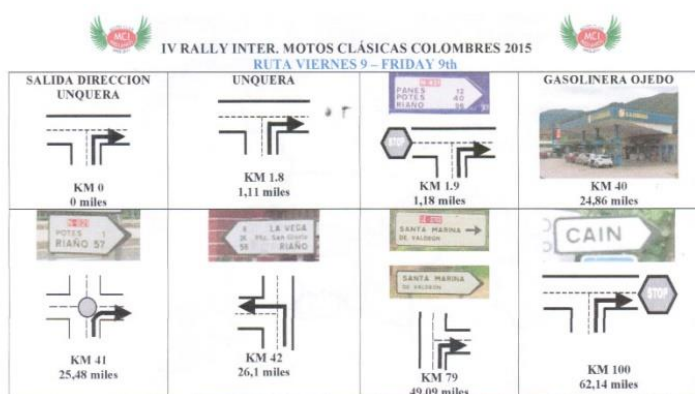
I had always intended to take an MZ on the rally, entering my ES250 Trophy; Mike and Bill entered on 650cc Triumphs. During the course of the next 6 months both Bill and Mike decided they would ride MZs as well (there decision, no arm twisting from me - honest). Mike already owned a Supa5 and Bill bought one on eBay around June '14. To complete the set I decided to use my Supa5 as well. Later we were christened the East Berlin team by one German rider and the Stasi by a Spanish rider. The organisers were relaxed about changes in bike as long as they complied with the 1988 cut-off which all 3 met comfortably. I have to say that there was then a resounding silence from January as we heard nothing further and really began to wonder what we would find on arrival in Colombres. A view shared by some other friends who had (unknown to us) also entered the rally for the first time. It was only about a week before we were due to sail that an email arrived confirming where and when we could sign on.

Bike preparation was limited to routine servicing in the main though Mike and I did fit new front tyres and a Honda front wheel with 7" tils brake to my bike in recognition of the mountain roads we would be riding. Both the other bikes already had Honda brakes. I should add that all three bikes were getting regular use to detect any likely faults. Bill complained on the day of departure about a funny noise made by his engine which we could not reproduce when I gave it a test ride. From the

way he described it the noise could have been pre-ignition so I took solder and head shims with me – a sensible precaution as it turned out.

Our ferry was scheduled to depart from Plymouth on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October around 3:15 so we set off around 10am. The roads were clear and we were on the quay by 1pm. Loading took forever and we were amongst the last aboard; the boat did not actually sail until near 5pm. The ferry was great but the trip itself was boring and uneventful at least so far as I was concerned. I am told the seas were a bit rough through the Bay of Biscay but I managed to sleep through it all. I was on the top bunk and Bill thought I was going to fall off and land on him. The only other excitement was trying to figure out how to turn what seemed to be a 2-berth cabin into the 4-berth we had booked. Eventually we found out that the upper beds dropped from the ceiling – fortunately before we had sent for the steward. Being last on the boat proved beneficial as we were almost first off but that meant we had no one to follow to the exit which differed considerably from what google maps had suggested. We drove for what seemed miles through Santander’s docklands finally emerging at a roundabout right on the A67 which was our planned route.

Spanish motorways are very good with excellent signage and we were in Colombres by just after 2pm. As the information office where we were to sign on did not open until 4:30 we went straight to our hotel – the Mirador de la Franca about 3 miles out of town and right on the beach. To my intense relief we were expected and we did have a 3-bed room as booked. There was a momentary panic when they could not find my name on the list as it had been listed under Bill’s name. For the record the hotel was excellent and without doubt the best of those offered for the rally. When we arrived there were already 20-30 bikes parked up and loads more arrived later either new arrivals from the same ferry or riders returning from the Monday run. The bikes were soon unloaded and proved to have survived the trip unscathed. We took the van down to the signing on office – just as well as it poured with rain while we were there. The organisers had pre-booked all the hotels so we paid our accommodation charges to them along with the rally fees and returned with a



comprehensive guide to the rally, routes for the full 7 days, a t-shirt, a nice glass souvenir a badge for the front of the bike and a small card the purpose of which only became clear later. The daily routes were in tulip form and included pictures of the actual signposts at each junction – first class and they proved both accurate and easy to use during the whole week. An

extract from one route is shown. They also included a Google overview of the route so you knew roughly where you were heading (or had been). The route was also marked with red arrows at many junctions and some were manned. Despite all of this we did observe a few people missing junctions.

Each days run started from the square in Colombres (actually a circle) at 10am so we arrived there about 9:30 on the Tuesday morning for our first ride. Apart from a handful of smallish Spanish 2-strokes a BSA C12 and a Tiger Cub our MZs proved to be the smallest non local bikes in the event. Triumph, BSA, BMWs and Sanglas comprised the majority with smaller numbers of many other makes – some extremely interesting models rarely seen in the UK. We were told there were 350 entries though not everyone rode every day and I guess there were about 200 or so present on our

first day. We were amongst the first away as our bikes were parked near the exit and this proved a mistake as the world and its dog just had to get past the smelly 2-strokes. We found this intimidating not being used to being passed on what to us Brits seemed like the wrong side. I was leading on this leg and the sheer number of bikes made it difficult to see the other two in the pack behind so I pulled over until the road had cleared and we then rode at our own pace in convoy. The first days run was about 120 miles with lunch provided in a remote village up a long track. The views in the mountains were breathtaking to our eyes but in reality just a taster for what was to come. Road surfaces with a few honourable exceptions were excellent even on what we would class as B or C roads. However, they were very twisty with successions of sharp bends and virtually no straights. Much of the time you had a rock wall on one side and a long drop on the other; usually protected by Armco which might have been safe for a car but lethal to a rider. We proceeded very cautiously and were amazed at the speed some travelled on these roads. All too soon were at the finish in Colombres then made our way to the hotel filling up the bikes on the way. We had rain during the day which never persisted but some roads were damp especially those where the sunlight could not penetrate and we tackled these very cautiously. My front tyre did let go briefly on one bend but it was mainly rider error plus the fact that I was scrubbing in a new tyre.

The bikes did not miss a beat all day though there was a noticeable difference in performance and fuel consumption. Gallingly mine was the slowest not by much but it lacked the pulling power up hills of the other two and it averaged just over 60mpg, Mikes did about 70mpg and Bills a very satisfying 80mpg. His had a new Bing carb and a freshly rebuilt engine which probably explains his figures. No idea yet why mine was underperforming but as it otherwise ran perfectly it was left well alone. All three bikes started first kick every time – magic. We stayed in the hotel for dinner which was a 3 course menu with wine for under £10 – indeed apart from the Thursday night when the organisers laid on a free bash in the village sports hall we ate there every night as did most of the guests.

The routes got better every day mostly varying from 110 to 150 miles all through the impressive Pecos mountains. We slowly gained confidence so that we could tackle the innumerable blind bends with more élan. To the end we remained mystified by some of the speed restriction warnings which at times were clearly related to urban areas and at others had no obvious significance. Unlike many others we obeyed them all which meant we were frequently passed at these times, otherwise we mainly managed to keep up with the flow. If anything it was coming down the steep hills where we had speed issues as 2-strokes have little engine braking and the Honda brakes worked overtime though never once fading out or giving any concern.

On the Saturday we had a very shorter 40 mile route as there was a party in the square in Colombres with all the bikes lined up around the edge, a marquee in the centre dispensing food & drink plus a very good group. There was also a hill climb event which ran from Bustio up to Colombres with the pits based in the square. Some immaculately turned out bikes mostly Ossa's Bultacos and Montesa's with a few Morinis and Ducatis as well. I am ashamed to say we never got round to watching the actual hill climb as there was plenty to see and do in the square as well as an Autojumble in the sports hall. The number of people was staggering, seemed like most of Northern Spain had turned out for the event. The weather had got better by the day and Saturday was a scorcher as was Sunday which was also a shorter 65 mile route so that those who wished to could get back to Colombres to watch the moto-cross in the afternoon. It was only latterly that we found out that the card they had given us at the beginning of the week was intended to give us access to these various events, the lunch time meals and a free drink every day at a local taverna. In practise we were only asked for it once and we decided having a drink during the day, free or otherwise, was not a good idea. We had

found the crowds in Colombres a bit overwhelming on the Saturday so for Sunday we had a lazy coffee en-route and wended our way direct to the hotel for a quiet beer then loaded the bikes on the van. Just as well because it rained incessantly on Monday until we reached Santander. We felt sorry for those brave souls who had to ride back to the ferry. Suddenly it was all over, the overnight crossing (back to Portsmouth) was smooth if a bit boring and once again we were off the boat quickly. Border control was a lot more stringent coming home and we had to open up the van to show what we were carrying. Nevertheless we were home for tea on the Tuesday.

To summarise this is a well organised and thoroughly enjoyable rally which cost us under £600 each (ferry £200, Hotel half-board 3 sharing a room for 7 nights around £210 and entry to the rally £55 plus petrol which is well under £1 per litre. We will certainly be back. The bikes themselves proved almost 100% reliable during the course of the week each covering circa 700 miles. We had three incidents which were more comical than serious. The plug cap started jumping of Mike's bike towards the end of the week – fixed with gaffer tape. Bills bike had a flat battery which we never really got to the bottom of but as it had the Powerdynamo system this was easily rectified and the battery was fully charged again by the end of the day. A dodgy fuse seems most likely. Bill's bike was knocking badly on the overrun when hot so on Wednesday we measured the squish setting which proved to be circa 1.00mm far too small. It took only 30 minutes to remove the head, fit the shims I had brought and get the squish up to 1.45mm. It ran fine thereafter with no noticeable reduction in power nor increase in fuel consumption. Never laid a spanner on mine though it will be getting some attention now we are home to find out why it's suddenly got thirstier and slower than the others. We did debate whether the MZs had been the right choice and though neither Mike nor Bill are enthusiasts for the marque like myself we all concluded that they had been an ideal choice. They were light and agile, enough power to get up the hills, reliable and fun. Engine braking would have been nice but Mr Honda took care of that issue. Deciding what to ride next year will be a problem to savour over the winter.

Other thoughts on the event; Some riders did seem to get carried away treating it as a race rather than a social run. Often their enthusiasm exceeded their skill and there were a number of 'offs' during the first few days. Fortunately none of the injuries were life changing but several bikes were subsequently unrideable. Things settled down later in the week. Very few (Locals included) seemed to pay much attention to the speed limits or other rules of the road such as the no overtaking signs. In Spain a continuous white line down the centre of the road must not be crossed nor may you overtake at that point even if it could be done without crossing the white line. An amazing number of bikes had tyres which would never have passed an MoT in the UK including some extremely valuable UK registered classic bikes. On the other hand remarkably little spannering was done in our hotel at the end of each day by anyone and most Brit bikes seemed quite oil tight. A backup truck was provided every day and I only saw it used once for a breakdown during the whole week though it did get rather more use recovering accident damaged bikes. Finally, the Spanish seem to extract remarkable performance out of their smaller bikes and none of us will forget being passed like we were standing still on a steep mountain road by a guy on a Lambretta. Nor will the guy on a big Guzzi he also passed. Likewise the demonstration by a young lady riding a scooter on how to tackle the mountain roads smoothly and safely at a speed we found hard to match. Perhaps I should have mentioned that all three of us are well past 70. Some of the pictures taken on the event are in a separate document.