



Crack on,
Monty

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Many know the names of veteran and vintage firms such as Coventry Eagle, yet other motorcycle firms such as Montgomery have all but disappeared, almost without trace. This rare 1935 Greyhound is kennelled at Sammy Miller's New Hampshire museum.

It's strange how some veteran and vintage motorcycle firms like Coventry Eagle were – and still are – well known, but others, such as the Coventry-based Montgomery have all-but disappeared almost without trace.

Few know the name of Montgomery, yet it produced a wide range of motorcycles, plus various attachments for passenger conveyance, and lasted from the turn of the 20th century until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Like most of its contemporaries Montgomery usually employed proprietary engines, but it made its own frames and components (incidentally including an innovative leaf-sprung front fork used by Coventry Eagle) and supplied frames to other manufacturers including for the Brough Superior. Although we have it on good authority that no two Montgomerys were identical (see history box-out).

So, rivet counters can put their magnifying glasses away, because there is probably no such thing as a standard specification for a Montgomery Greyhound like the original test machine, but this beauty currently resides in Sammy Miller's museum workshop in Hampshire (tel: 01425 616644) yet is owned by Worcestershire enthusiast Alan Curtis.

Alan is best known as a collector of SOS two-strokes but is equally interested in other old motorcycles with a bit of character. He bought this one from Joyce Cobbing – well known for her association with the VMCC tyre scheme – in whose garage it had apparently stood for 30-odd years.

"It had suffered quite badly," Alan recalls, "things like the mudguards were beyond sensible repair, and the engine refused to turn over until I'd tinkered with it for a while. I started the restoration myself, having the magdyno refurbished locally at considerable cost and getting the tank repainted. I also looked for a twin port cylinder head (one of the many options) for appearance's sake but couldn't find one, so I bought the impressive Klaxon horn to mount on the left-hand side instead. One lucky purchase on eBay was the Lucas headlamp; when I opened it up it still had the wiring instructions inside, so I suspect it had never been used!"

Alan was then faced with the prospect of the restoration stalling while he went ahead with a planned upgrade to his garage, but decided not to wait and contacted Sammy Miller – who has restored several of Alan's projects in the past. As usual Sammy and his main man Bob Stanley completed the bike in record time at a reasonable cost, and as will be seen by those who visit the museum before Alan manages to collect it, the end result looks superb.

Bob tells me that there were few serious problems during the rebuild, although things like the bearings had naturally suffered during the Montgomery's lengthy hibernation. The biggest difficulty was getting it to run properly due to unexpected problems with the expensively refurbished magneto.

SAMMY MILLER MUSEUM



The Sammy Miller Motorcycle Museum is at Bashley Cross Road, New Milton, Hants BH25 5SZ. Tel 01425 620777

When I take to the saddle I find that it now starts easily and runs really well, apart from a slight stutter on initial acceleration. That's doubtless due to a 'mix and match' carburettor (a crack was discovered in the original body) and would respond to a slide with less cutaway, but in any case it would be hardly noticeable if I wasn't doing repeat stops and starts for the camera.

That aside, the Montgomery amply demonstrates how illogical it is to regard the bigger and better post-vintage bikes as museum pieces. From the saddle it feels little different from, say, a rigid AJS Model 18 made a couple of decades later. The seating position is comfortable, the forks work well (they are from premier supplier Druid, and good girders beat sloppy teles any day) and my only complaint about the handling is that a gigantic turning circle puts a stop to country lane U-turns.

Signs of the era of the machine's birth can be seen in the hand gearchange and the exposed valve gear (foot change and valve enclosure being among the options evidently not exercised in this particular case). But it has four ratios in the box, even though the torquey engine could cope with fewer, and the rockers and valve stems benefit from positive lubrication thanks to a recirculatory oil system. Mechanically, the whole engine – including the valvegear – is commendably quiet, and seems equally happy pulling at steam engine revs, or powering along at very respectable speeds.

“The Montgomery was supplied by Renno’s of Islington, which claimed to have London’s largest showroom.”

The primary chaincase isn't enclosed, but a tiny pipe leading to it from the oil tank reveals a novel method of chain lubrication. The pipe's inner end nestles up against the oil return inside the tank, so it receives oil mist and the occasional dribble of oil when the engine is running, and you don't have to turn off the supply when you stop.

This Montgomery was supplied by Renno's of Islington, which described itself in period advertisements as having 'London's Largest Showrooms'.

The cynic in me notes that having large showrooms didn't necessarily mean that Renno's was exceedingly good at selling motorcycles, but perhaps I'm influenced by the way it resorted to offering bargain bundles including a Montgomery 500 and sidecar for 49 guineas, billing it as "A Combination for LESS than the price of a solo".

It sounded a bit desperate, but Montgomery had already survived many setbacks, and was still determinedly plugging away at the end of the decade when production was halted by the Second World War. Given the firm's longevity it's probable that an attempt would have been made to restart motorcycle production after being diverted on to war work for the duration of hostilities, but it never got the chance as the factory was bombed during the air raids on Coventry. ■



1 There are steering and friction damper knobs. **2** Montgomery was originally founded in Suffolk. **3** Renno's transfer boasts of the firm's showroom. **4** Novel form of chain lubrication. **5** Capable and stable, the Montgomery feels much younger than its years.



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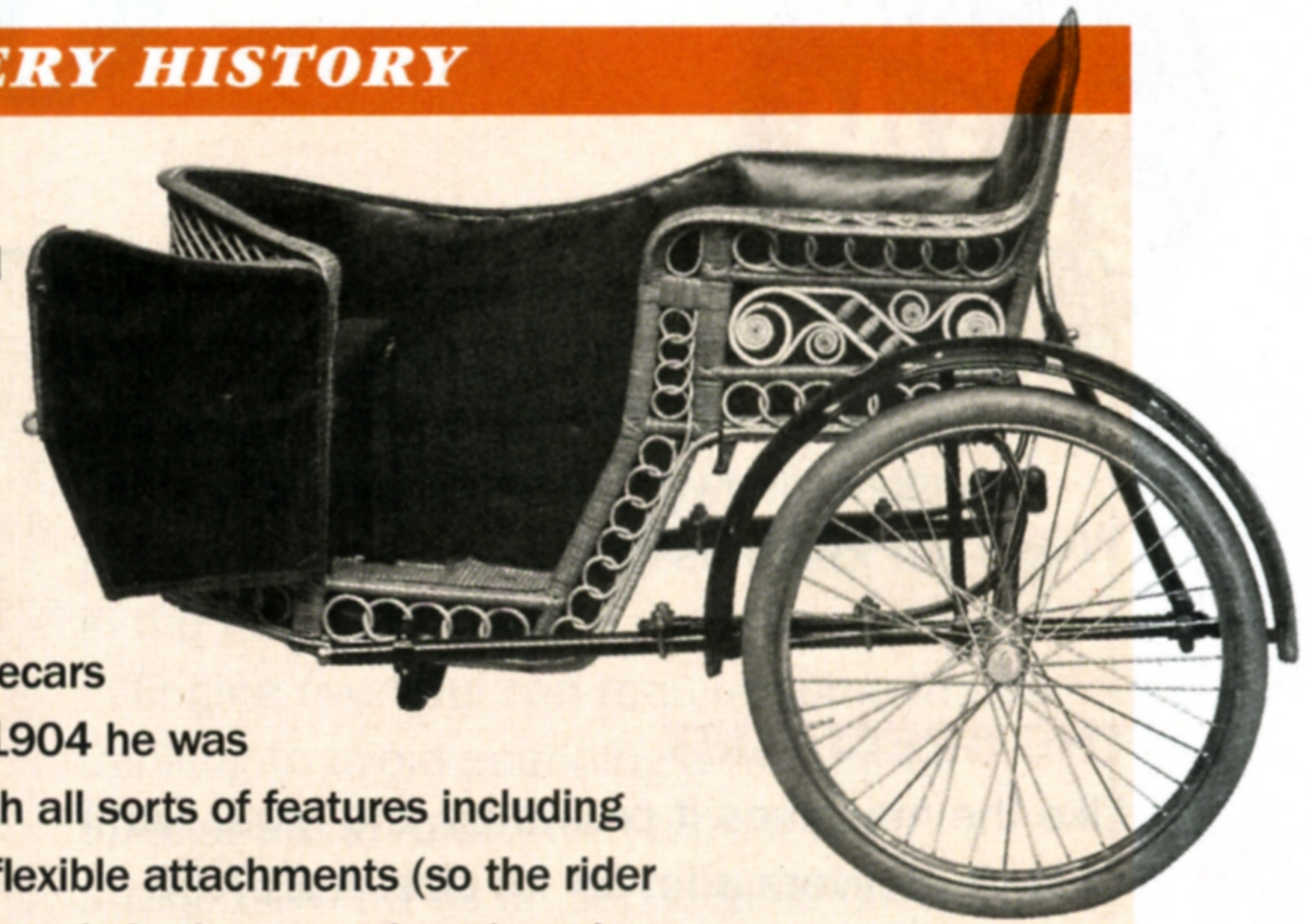
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6 The 500cc KOZ JAP engine is a lusty performer.
7 Montgomery production ended with the Second World War.

MONTGOMERY HISTORY

Naturally enough, the firm was named after its founder – Bill Montgomery – and he initially set up shop at Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk.

Initially he made forecars and trailers, but by 1904 he was making sidecars with all sorts of features including sprung wheels and flexible attachments (so the rider could lean the motorcycle in the normal way), and even sidecars that could be mounted on both sides of the motorcycle! A year later he was making Montgomery motorcycles as well, enabling his customers to buy a complete outfit from one source. However, the factory's situation was evidently too far off the beaten track, and within a few years it was relocated nearer the hub of Britain's industry at Coventry.

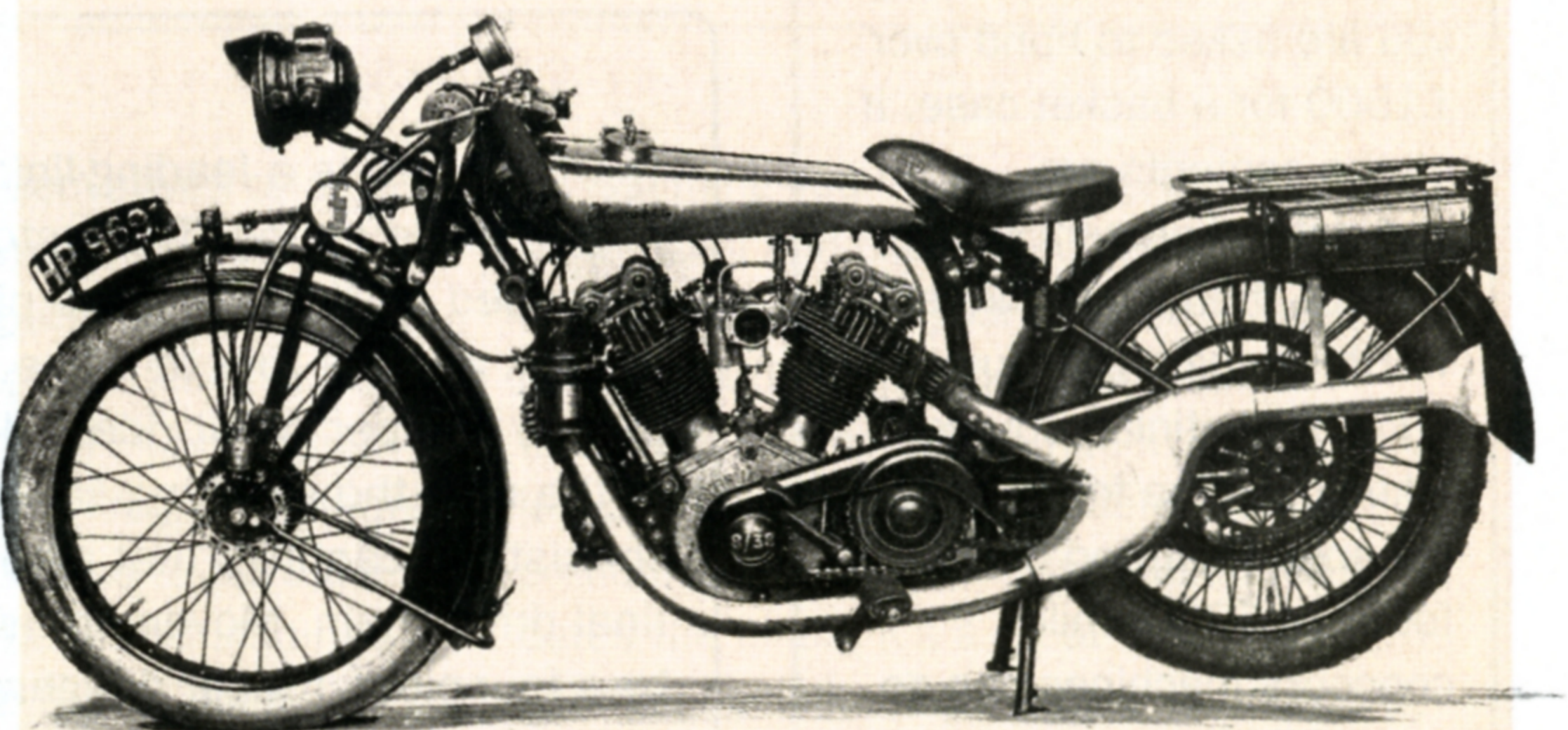


Montgomery was still keenly interested in sidecars, and among other projects produced child-sized ones, and coachbuilt bodies to replace outdated wickerwork jobs. Naturally the firm's motorcycles from this era tended to be large capacity jobs suitable for sidecar use, but 1913 saw the introduction of an innovative own-make 370cc flat twin engine. There was then an understandable lull during the First World War, but production resumed afterwards with a wide selection of machines powered by proprietary engines ranging from a 147cc Villiers to a one-litre Anzani. The firm survived a potentially disastrous fire in 1925, and soon resumed production in a new factory elsewhere in Coventry. By 1930 – when sidecar production ceased – a large and varied range of machines was being listed.

In fact, the width of the range was slightly illusory as there were only two frames housing everything from a 250cc Villiers single to a one litre JAP V-twin. It was a sensible strategy but times were tough and – after another change of premises and a pause in production – a reduced selection of 350 and 500cc machines was offered in 1932. They must have been reasonably successful, though, as the range subsequently expanded until it again featured everything from small two-strokes to thundering V-twins, as shown below.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the result of making umpteen models with only slight differences between them was a frankly chaotic model naming policy. Some Montgomeries were prosaically named after their features or function, so there was the 250 Two-Stroke, the 680 Twin, the 350 Standard and the 500 Sports, but other models were named after dogs without any obvious relationship between title and type. A Montgomery Terrier, for example, started with a logical capacity of 98cc, but other versions went up to an incongruous 550cc which dwarfed the whole pack of Retrievers, most of the Greyhounds, and half of the Bulldogs!

Far from being shy about this confusing state of affairs, the firm saw it as a virtue, and *Motor Cycle* magazine's announcement of the 1935 model range said that although: "Standard and de luxe models form the main Montgomery programme... any standard model can be bought by those whose purses are of moderate dimensions, and can be converted by degrees, until it becomes a full de luxe model."



1935 MONTGOMERY GREYHOUND

Engine.typeJAP type KOZ ohv single	SuspensionDruid girder forks, rigid rear
Capacity498cc	Tyres325x19 front and rear
Bore x stroke85mm x 88mm	Brakess.s drums 6in front 7in rear
Lubricationrecirculating from external tank	Tank capacity2.5 gallons
Carburettorhorizontal jet AMAL	Seat height29in
Ignition/lightingLucas Magdyno	Wheelbase59in
Gearboxfour-speed hand change Albion	Weight343lb
Transmissionall chain	Top speed70-75mph
Frameopen loop with engine as stressed member	Fuel consumption80mpg approx
	Price new£45-£50 approx (depending on specification)

CLUB CONTACTS

Vintage Motor Cycle Club, National Secretary, Allen House, Wetmore Road, Burton upon Trent, Staffs, DE14 1TR.

FURTHER READING

Road tests, spares lists and manuals available to buy from the Mortons Media Group Ltd archive. Contact Jane Skayman 01507 529423 or email jskayman@mortons.co.uk for prices and details.