

Dear Murray,

This is a record of what happened to Frank Whiteway's 1970 Isle of Man Production T.T. winning T500 Crooks Suzuki after 1970. I came by the machine by knowing Frank and Eddie Crooks having owned and raced a Crooks Suzuki T20 250 prepared by Frank in the 1969 and 70 Production & 250 T.Ts. the 250 finished every race and did achieve 3rd in 69 partnered by 55 year old Pat Walsh and 5th partnered by Ken Armstrong in the Thruxton 500 mile endurance race and a Production T.T. 7th & 8th. Handling was the big problem compared Ducati's & Bultaco's.

It should be said that in the 1970 race Frank's T500 machine was timed at only 116mph at the Highlander speed trap. Yet he finished the race just 6 seconds under 90 mph. After The T.T. I bought the machine from Eddie, apart from having the standard baffles removed and a short tail pipe inserted in the silencers the machine was bog standard. Other than seat, tank, fairing rear sets and ace handlebars.

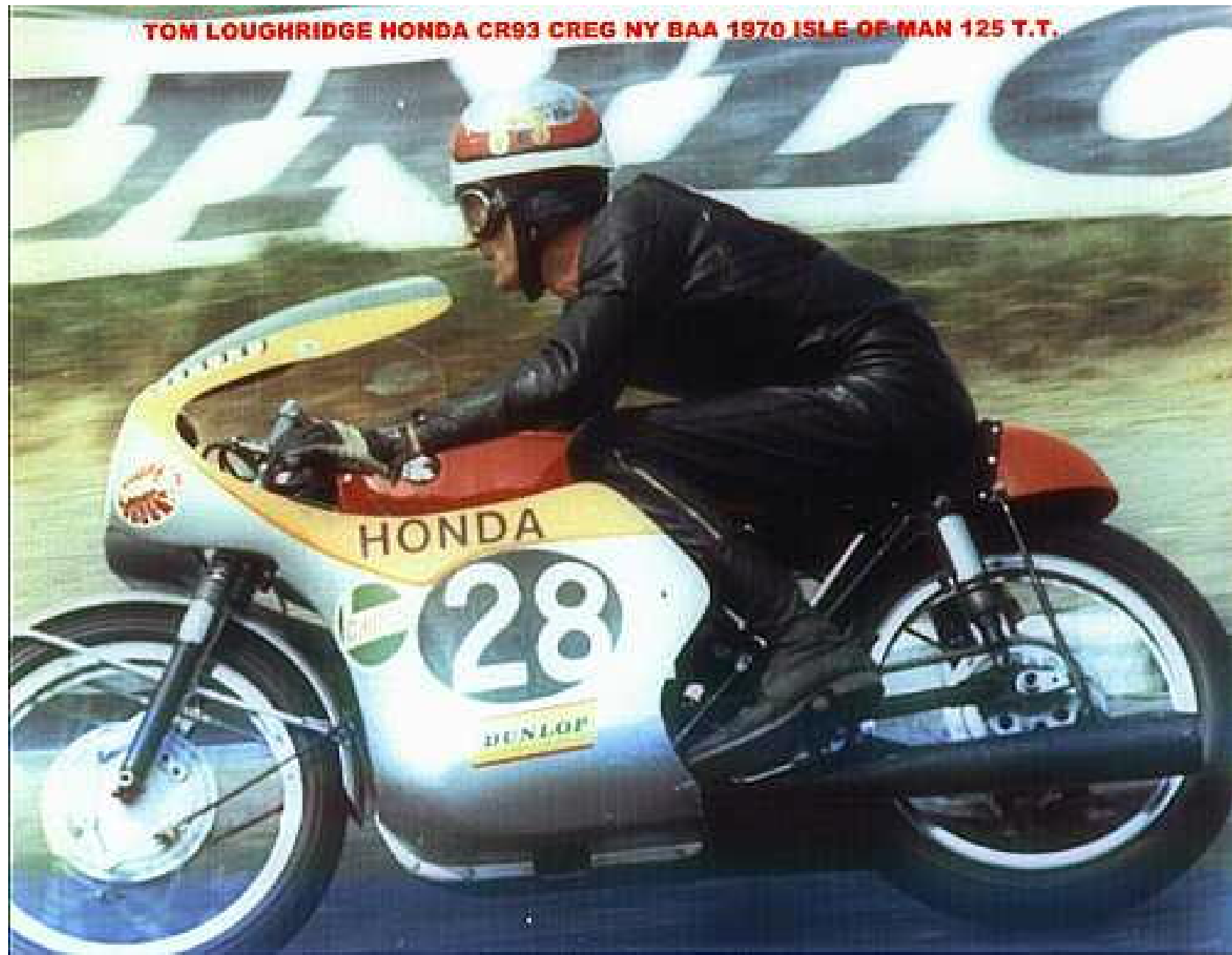
Between 1971 and 1978 I raced the bike in 20 T.T. races Production, 500 Senior 500, Formula 750, Formula 1, 1000 Classic and the 1000 Jubilee including practice laps I covered over 13,000 racing miles in the Isle of Man on top of that it ran in the Thruxton 500 5 times plus hundreds of other races.



The 1971 T.T. was remarkable the T 500 did 28 laps of practice and I rode it in the 1st ever 750 T.T. finishing 13th. The Production 5th and the 500 Senior 13th it won three silver replicas. A total of 1,800 racing miles, all that was done to it between practise sessions and races was fill it with oil and petrol, change tyres, chain and race numbers and clean the flies off the screen.

The best ride of the week was the production, after having a two minute penalty at the massed Le Mans start for failing to start by mechanical means I had to wait two minutes after everyone had gone before I was allowed a pusher. I was convinced I was going to finish last. After refuelling I started to catch up, on the last lap I got a signal board from someone saying I was 9th. At the 33rd milestone there were five 500s in a line, Martin Ashwood, the late Danny Shimmin. P. Jones all on Suzuki's, and Bill Milne on a Kawasaki Mach 3 and myself. P. Jones was remarkably on are rare T350

Going down to Creg ny Baa I somehow outbraked all four in one go. At the finish it was Martin and myself side by side and we were both credited with a race time of 85.54, I was 4/5ths of a second in front by a wheel. See Martins account, "MCM at the 71 T.T". on this website. To cap the week off I won another silver replica in the 250 on a Crooks Suzuki TR 250 and retired with a broken crank while 3rd on the last lap of the 125, but that was on my old Honda CR93.



On a number of occasions I experienced total front brake failure and went straight down the slip road at signpost after cooking the front brake at Creg ny Baa and Brandish. The front drum brake had been described in various road tests, as between poor and adequate for use on the standard road bike with a top speed of 105 mph. The truth was it was lethal and useless, particularly in a 226-mile high-speed road race like the Isle of Man at speeds of over 120mph

The big breakthrough in 1972 was when in the interests of safety the ACU allowed the homologation of Dunstall twin discs to be fitted to T500 Suzuki's for production racing. Prior to that the T500 was positively dangerous to race in a 6-lap 226-mile race on a public road circuit, particularly considering the speeds obtained descending the mountain in the Isle of Man.

George Ratcliffe, previously a development engineer at Norton-Villiers who had prepared Peter Inchleys works Starmaker did a lot of work on the cylinders. I also fitted works sand-cast central plug TR heads and straight cut primary gears provided by Eddie Crooks. This increased the Isle of Man Highlander speed trap time to 130 mph.

For 1972 I also built a TR500. with all of the proper works bits supplied by Eddie Crooks. George Ratcliffe again prepared the motor, and also designed and made the expansion chambers. Jack Machin of Lincoln built the frame seat and petrol 6-gallon tank. We took it to the T.T. untried. Fast it was. But with 5 different machines to get qualified I did not do more than the minimum three laps to get it qualified. The Formula 750 saw the TR 500 flying on the straights, but putting me in big trouble at places like Glen Helen and Alpine cottage to name a few places, being more attracted to the walls and pavements than the road.

I persevered into the second lap hoping the reduction in fuel weight would help the terrifying handling, it only went quicker and handled worse. At Ramsey with an urgent need to visit the little boys room and another five races to go I called it a day toured back over the mountain to the Grandstand and dumped it in the finishers enclosure.

The TR 500 stayed in the garage for the 500 Senior and I wheeled out Old Faithful the T500 production bike, again it churned out a nice steady 86mph-race average picking up another bronze replica. I took it to the Southern 100 in the Isle of Man, but with a philosophy of racing for pleasure not pain again I raced the T500 proddie bike

Stan Woods, the Works Heron-Suzuki rider churned out another cracking production T.T. win for a T500R Crooks-Suzuki at 92-20mph and a new record lap of 93-61. increased my own race speed by exactly the same margin that Stan did over Franks. Me, I had my thumb up my bum and only managed 8th but the T500 ran like a train and won me another Silver Replica.

1972 also put the writing on the wall for my TR250 Suzuki. This had also been a cracking reliable bike to ride. It was in fact a TR250 motor supplied by Eddie Crooks in a TS 250 Bultaco. Having followed Frank Whiteway in early morning practice on his TR 250 and seen how fast it was and how badly it handled in comparison with my own Bultaco, particularly through the top and bottom of Baggarow I decided to combine the two,

I had a copy of a 250 Bultaco frame made in Reynolds 531 and an Aluminium copy of the 5 gallon Fibre Glass tank I then scrapped the Bultaco and fitted all the cycle parts and Oldani front brake. It was a cracking bike to ride, particularly on true road circuits like the T.T it handled like a dream Unfortunately by 1972 TR250s were getting a little long in the tooth and could not live with the speed of TD Yamaha's.

George did his best with the motor and we got revving harder and going quicker, but in the 250 T.T. it only got Union Mills a few miles from the Start and broke a conrod. We rebuilt the motor and put over bored 252cc barrels on it for the 350 Junior race, this time it got a little bit further to Glen Vine and did the same again. The only other TR250 raced was by Roger Sutcliffe riding Eddie Crook's bike. It was the only none Yamaha to finish in replica time.

1973 saw what was probably the worst condition's for a T.T. Production race it was bitterly cold on the 3rd lap lashing rain, and sleet, snow and hailstones on the mountain section. Described by Fred Hanks in the T.T. Special as a "rugged hailstone invaded race and the riders must have suffered a dreadful last 50 miles". The road was like a river. Even the 1st and 2nd home stopped with water trouble and Stan w

Over many years the T500 was consistently faster than many pukka racers, G50s, Manx Nortons and 650/750 BSAs, Nortons and Triumphs and even the odd Suzuki GS1000. The T500 had always been the fastest 500 production bike through the highlander speed trap. Its best time being 138 mph, and it set a new lap record in the ten lap 1975 production race, 95-45 mph. I was credited with this record in the press. But in fact it was Ian Richards my co rider who did it.

The only drawback with the bike was it's weight and handling left much to desired the faster we got it going, after six laps and 226 miles of the island it left you with aching limbs, but then the machine was never designed for speeds over 110 mph. I am convinced that if it had handled better with the right jockey it would have done a 100mph lap.

In 1972 at the Oulton Park Easter Monday International 500 race, the bike was faster than, and I beat Stan Woods on the works TR500 Heron Suzuki. Rex White Heron Suzuki G.Bs team manager, was mortified. I probably had an advantage because it lashed down with rain and I was running Dunlop TT 100 tyres, which all production bikes used in those days.

Having raced everything from 125s to 750s in the T.T. including some of the best Ron Williams Maxton Yamaha's. In 1977 I had two 250's and two 350's one of each for myself and Charlie Williams who I sponsored and won the 77 250 for me, and 2nd in the 1000 classic, and 2nd in the 250 in 78. The T500 was probably the most reliable T.T. machine I owned. T.T. retirements were down to silly things, such as in the 1975 ten lap production race when a loose condensor wire dropped us from 1st on the last lap to 5th and again in 76 when again after changing riders and re-fuelling on the 6th lap Ian had a split petrol tank at the bottom of Bray Hill.

The only reason I sold the bike in 1978 was because with the T.T. dropping production racing and super fast Yamaha TZ 350s and 750s and RG500s in the open classes and no hope of getting better than a 95mph lap out of the bike I had switched to Maxton Yamaha's.

The T500 was a great bike with a great history.

Tom Loughridge