

Tom Loughridge's Race Days



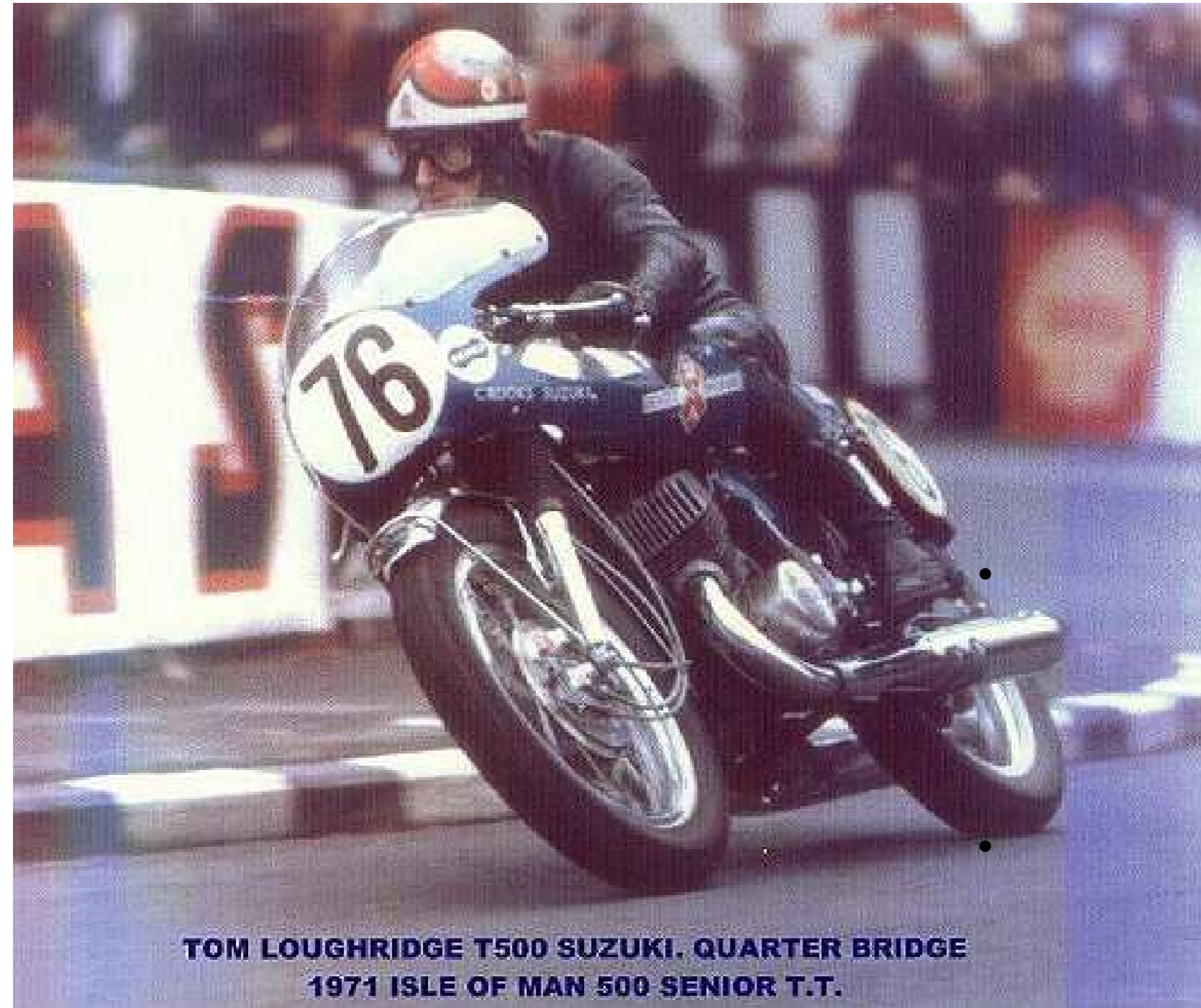
Tom Loughridge racing in the Isle of Man TT

Hi Murray, as promised the story of my experience of a great sporting relationship with Eddie Crooks, Frank Whiteway, Stan Woods, Les Trotter, the late Danny Shimmin and many others who rode Crooks' Suzuki's during the classic 60s and 70s. when we all raced for the love of the sport, particularly in the greatest true public road race in the world. the Isle of Man TT, with particular references to the superb T500 in the TT, Northwest 200 and Thruxton 500 mile endurance races.

I first rode a Crooks Suzuki T20 production bike prepared for me by Frank Whiteway in 1969 to third place in the 250 class at the Thruxton 500 mile race partnered by Pat Walsh who was 55 years old. I then used the bike in the TT with an 8th place in the production race and a lowly 24th in the international 250. but the bike went like a train and I was glad that I had left the much faster but unreliable 250 Bultaco in the garage.

Sadly Tom Loughridge passed away in 2019

All pictures and text are copyright and are the property of Tom Loughridge
Source code and page design copyright Murray Barnard Perth Western Australia 2001
No part of this site may be copied and duplicated without express permission of the copyright owners.



**TOM LOUGHRIDGE T500 SUZUKI. QUARTER BRIDGE
1971 ISLE OF MAN 500 SENIOR T.T.**

The T20 was just unbreakable; but I was never impressed with its handling and never really got on with it over the TT mountain course. Having witnessed the superior handling of Eddie Crooks' T500 for 500 miles at Thruxton I decided I was having it and swiftly did a deal with Eddie to swop the T20 in part exchange. So started my long and happy seven year very low cost relationship with the Crooks Suzuki T500 production racer.

This was the Crooks Suzuki T500 history in my ownership:

1971 TT

500 Production 5th silver replica.

Formula 750 13th silver.

Senior 500 26th silver.

1972 TT

500 production 8th silver rep. Fastest through speed trap 121mph. Stan Woods was first on the Crooks Suzuki T500R.

Formula 750 retired. (loose alternator wire)

500 senior 30th bronze replica.



●Tom Loughridge breaking the T.T. lap record on his 500cc production Suzuki.

- 1973 TT:
Production - fastest through speed trap - 127mph. Race described by Fred Hanks in the TT special - "suddenly an exciting and dramatic event was being turned into a rugged hailstone-invaded race which had London Policeman Graham Bailey retiring at the pits shaking his head in disgust". Retired with swamped electrics.
Formula 750 32nd.
500 senior 22nd bronze replica.
- 1974 TT:
Production - fastest through speed trap - 132mph - 6th place. silver replica.

I had changed machines to a 350 Yamaha for the classic 1000 and 500 senior races. Loaned to me by that great Grand Prix rider John Williams because he was a non starter through injury. Sadly John who later became Barry Sheene's works Suzuki team mate succumbed to heart failure after a minor injury at the 1979 Ulster Grand Prix. John Woodley from New Zealand had travelled over to Northern Ireland with John, Charlie Williams, Stan Woods and myself. John as I recall fell off in the same 500 race as John Williams and went to Belfast hospital at the same time.

TOM LOUGHRIDGE. T500 SUZUKI. SCRUTINEERING 1974 PRODUCTION T.T. FINISHED 6TH



The Crooks Suzuki T500 at scrutineering 1974.
Finished in 6th place 500 production race.

- 1975 TT:
10 lap two rider production race fastest through speed trap -138mph. Partnered by Ian Richards 5th with a new lap record of 95.45 mph set up by Ian. A misfire caused by a loose condensor wire dropped us back from leading to 5th placed 500 at the finish.
- 1976 TT:
Production - another 10 lap two rider race again partnered by Ian Richards who retired at the bottom of Bray Hill with a split petrol tank.
Senior 500 - retired (repaired petrol tank weeping).
1000cc classic - non starter (no fuel tank no race).
- 1977 TT:
The production race was discontinued.
Formula 1000cc retired.
500 senior 35th.
1000cc classic 30th
1000cc Schweppes Jubilee retired.



By this time I was wasting my time trying to compete with a near standard 500 production bike against RG500s, TZ350s/750s, 900 Ducatis and the like, with average race speeds of 110mph, even the last of the Bronze Replica winners was averaging over 100 mph down in 19th place. I then sold the bike.

Left: the 1970 T500 Crooks production Suzuki. In its last race at the 1978 Isle of Man Southern 100.



In addition to the TT I raced the T500 at Oulton Park Internationals, the Isle of Man Southern 100 and 100's of other races. The engine, gearbox and clutch never once failed.

Martin Crooks then found the bike in 1992 as a café racer road bike and restored it to the original condition and spec as Stuart Graham, Frank Whiteway, Stan Woods and myself had raced it in 1970/71. It is now in Murray's motor cycle museum in the Isle of Man.

I never won a TT but lived to race there. but having only sight in one eye since birth, I did have a bit of a handicap and my own forged doctors stamp for my international licence medical form. That's my excuse anyway.



TOM LOUGHRIDGE TR 500 SUZUKI
1972 ISLE OF MAN F750 T.T.

[Click on the pic for a larger image](#)

1972 TR 500 Suzuki

Does it not really look the business at the bottom of Bray Hill in the 1972 TT Formula 750 race? Don't kid yourself. I retired this bike at the pits in sheer terror. I had built this bike during the winter having aquired a motor with all the best goodies off Eddie Crooks. George Ratcliffe (former development engineer at Villiers) did the motor and made the pipes. It was a very fast bike timed at 147mph Creg n Baa to Brandish. **But!!!** - Glen Helen, Kirk Micheal, Alpine Cottage, you name it, was uncontrollable. The first lap was slower than I could do on the T500. I persevered for a few laps and called it a day at Ramsey and toured it back to the pits to retire in one piece. I prudently raced the T500 production bike in the following 500 senior. This TR500 was so bad to ride I had forgotten I had owned it when I told you that the records showed a speed trap figure of nearly 150mph on the T500. It was this bike that did that not the T500. It was then swiftly disposed of and forgotten about.



TOM LOUGHRIDGE TR 250 SUZUKI/BULTACO 1972 ISLE OF MAN 250 T.T.

Suzuki/Bultaco TR250 special a cracking tool and a dream to ride.

Having seen how quick Eddie Crooks' TR250s were in the winter of 1971 I bought a TR250 motor and remote float carbs off Eddie. I had been racing a Bultaco TSS250. They handled superbly but were a nightmare to ride, unreliable and prone to seizing without warning. Broken primary chains and gearboxes and the gas pipe frames broke to pieces in the Isle of Man. Most Japanese bikes of the time were iffy in the steering department and TR250s were no exception. Rod Gould had put a Yamaha engine in a Bultaco so I had Jack machine build me an exact copy of the Bultaco frame in Reynolds 531 and had a copy of the large fibreglass tank made in aluminium. George Ratcliffe again did the motor and pipes.



**TOM LOUGHRIDGE TR250 SUZUKI/BULTACO SPECIAL
1972 ISLE OF MAN 250 T.T.**

It was dream, an instant starter, fast in its day, brilliant in the steering department and dead reliable and won me my first 250 International class Silver Replica in the TT and the highest placed non Yamaha machine. The only other Suzuki in the race was Alberto Pagani on Eddie's TR250 who only come within one minute of my lap times. But twice I came within a whisker of getting seriously hurt or worse on it. The first time in early morning practice I waited until Frank Whiteway lined up on Eddie's TR250, and slotted in behind him. I wanted to compare speeds and see if I could keep up with Frank who was a far superior rider to me.



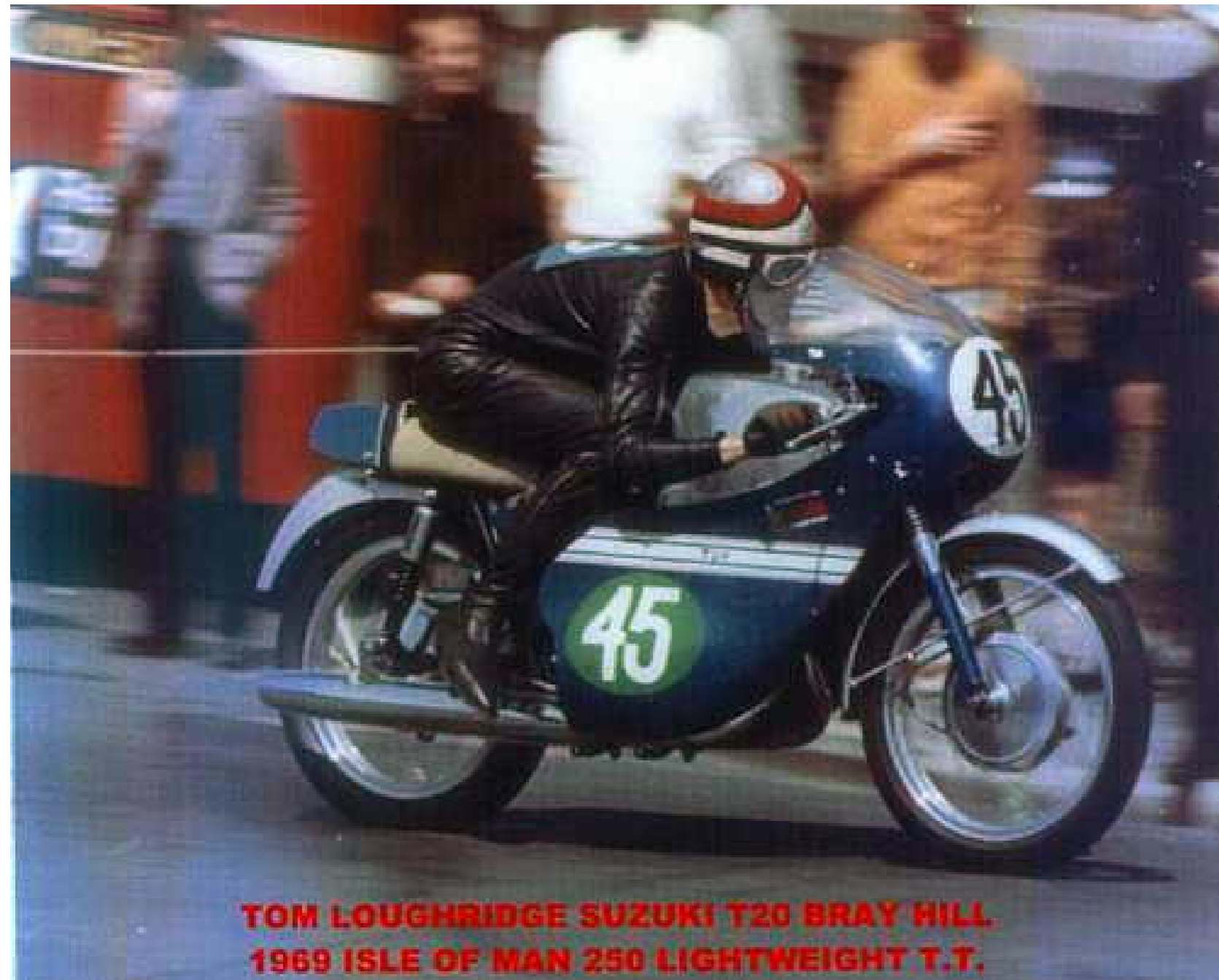
TOM LOUGHRIDGE TR250 SUZUKI BULTACO 1982 I.O.M. 8100. THE YOUNG LADY?
CANNOT REMEMBER HER NAME BUT SHE WAS A SCOT WHO PLAYED A GOOD GAME OF TENNIS

I tailed and slipstreamed Frank all the way to the bottom of Barregarow. I was on fire, my special was definitely steering better than Frank's bike. The genuine TR250s had a twin brake plate with a single cable leading from the lever to a junction box that bridged the front fender and two cables that went each side of the wheel to the brake plates.

As Frank bottomed the forks the junction box jammed on to the bottom yoke and locked the front wheel on solid. We would probably have been doing around 120mph, I was about 6 feet from his back wheel which came about eighteen inches off the road. I shot past him by inches, how I did not ram into the back of him I don't know.

I sat up slowed and looked back to see Frank hit the kerb and career down the road, feet off the pegs like aeroplane wings he brought the thing to a safe stop. Seeing he was okay I carried on I did not want to stop. Firstly I was having a cracking first practice lap on the 250 and secondly he probably "stunk like hell."

The second miracle was in the 250 race. I had fitted a steel Suzuki mudguard to the Bultaco forks, as is seen in the photo. I was flat out round the veranda on the mountain when the stays broke. The guard went around the front wheel and under the tyre it must have jammed under the tyre for a split second, because the bike slid sideways in a shower of sparks towards the sheep fencing and concrete posts, I heard the guard bang against fairing and saw it fly sideways. The front tyre found grip and the superb handling of this bike righted everything.



**TOM LOUGHRIDGE SUZUKI T20 BRAY HILL.
1969 ISLE OF MAN 250 LIGHTWEIGHT T.T.**

I had some cracking rides on this bike and it never failed; but Yamahas were getting faster and more reliable. For 1972 George did some mods to give me more revs. He modified the motor to take it over 250 so that I could use it in the 350 junior TT. It was quicker but the rods were not up to the extra revs. It broke a rod in the 350 race within a few miles of the start at Braddan Bridge. I rebuilt it for the 250 race, it got a few miles further on to Union Mills and it did the same again. At this time I was the only one still running a Suzuki in the 250 TT race other than Roger Sutcliffe on Eddie's TR250.

I succumbed to buying John Williams TD3 350 Yamaha for 1973 and put the TR250 back to standard; however, its days were numbered - Yamahas were putting in 100mph race averages. and records show that the fastest Crooks Suzuki TR250 TT race averages were in 1969 Frank Perris in 3rd at 93mph and Frank Whiteway a brilliant 5th place at 90mph.

R.I.P. Tom Loughbridge
Tom passed away in April 2019

