



Twenty-one Years of Age

CYRIL AYTON Briefly Reviews the History of the International Motorcyclists Tour Club which Has Just Achieved its Majority

LESS than three weeks ago in London, the International Motorcyclists Tour Club celebrated its coming of age. The ballroom used for the occasion was brightly bedecked with pennants collected by club members from all parts of Europe—from Hammerfest, at the bleak, northernmost tip of Norway, to romantic Venice, on the Adriatic. Anecdotes relating past discomforts and past enjoyments were told and retold throughout the evening; for many there was a semblance of nostalgia in these stories; and for a few, the recollections went back to the early '30s, when the possibilities of forming a foreign touring club were first discussed.

The object of the International Motorcyclists Tour Club is foreign touring by motor cycle. The Club is not a motor cycle club in the customary sense of the term, since the organizing of sporting events is outside its scope; and it is non-territorial, since its members are drawn from all parts of Britain and, indeed, from many parts of the world.

It is in these terms that the aims and principles of the I.M.T.C. are set out, and they are sufficient to establish that

the Club is unusual (and, in fact, unique) in the motor cycling world. At present, membership approaches 600 and the home organization is split into London, Midland and Northern Regions; yet, unexpectedly, there is nothing impersonal about the contact between the veteran committee man (who first pushed his motor cycle on to the exciting quay of Calais 30 years ago) and the newest, youngest member who nurtures half-formed schemes embracing the farthest accessible regions of Europe. The I.M.T.C. is a large club, yet it retains the informal, friendly spirit of a small local club. An extraordinary achievement, this, and one that stems from the guidance of two or three founder-members who first pondered the idea of a foreign touring club 21 years ago.

In the autumn of 1932, Miss Ida Crow and several of her friends, all foreign tourists of wide experience and keen motor cyclists, decided to approach others who habitually spent their holidays abroad by motor cycle. Riding on the Continent at that time had a decided sense of adventure attaching to it. Those who crossed the Channel were hardy, resourceful and knowledgeable—and relatively few. In the circumstances, there was obvious benefit to be derived from forming a group

of such enthusiasts; the sharing of experiences and practical information would be invaluable.

Preliminary notices were published in *The Motor Cycle* for October 27 and December 8, 1932, and the first meeting was held in Islington, North London, on December 14.

The discussions that were held were lengthy, involved and had far-reaching effects. At the end of the meeting Miss Crow was elected chairman and Harry Stubbings secretary. And thereafter, for a while, there was little activity until the gradually increasing number of members called for moving the meeting place from Islington to the George Inn, Little Britain, near St. Paul's, London.

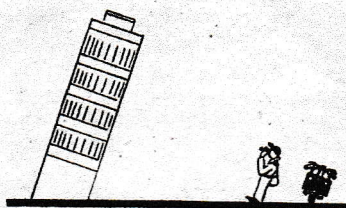
Early in April 1933, the feeling arose that for a club which had made up its mind, as it were, to become one of the foremost in the country, a rather more ceremonious, duly articulated beginning was desirable. Accordingly, a confirmatory meeting was held, at which Miss Crow was confirmed as chairman and Charles Middleton was elected treasurer.

Interest in the Club rapidly spread beyond London, and foreign tourists from counties as far north as Cumberland and Durham made application for membership. Already the Club was becoming faintly centralized and outlying groups were tending to feel that they were adrift from the centre of activity. So halfway through the year, the first slender *Magazine of the I.M.T.C.* appeared, a little ragged, flimsily bound and printed with the faltering help of a hand-operated duplicating machine. Throughout the ensuing 20 years to date the magazine (in greatly improved format) has come out without fail at the beginning of each month, except for an occasion during the war when one rather tardy issue was incorporated in the following month's publication. The magazine forms a valuable link between members and between groups; it provides up-to-the-minute information on social events and national and international rallies, on routes abroad and Sunday runs at home.

As early as November 1932, the idea of "partitours" had been discussed, and in 1934 a party of approximately 20 set off for Dover on the first stage of a 2,000 mile journey through France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. This partitour was the first of many and it set the high standard of fun and interest which has been fully maintained in tours in other countries in later years. There is still told, for instance, the tale of nine members who came together in 1935 with the object of attending an international rally at the opening of the Gross Glockner; of how, after a long, fruitless search over the carnival slopes of the Glockner no sign of the rally was found, and the party returned through chilling rain to Zell an See and, days later, finally enjoyed a reunion celebration with another I.M.T.C. party in one of the *biertärten* of Heidelberg. However, for that tour there was a surprise ending when, after a month back in England, it was learnt that the Austrians had selected Great Britain, represented by the I.M.T.C., as winning the rally!

Partitours were continued up to shortly before the outbreak of war; in 1938 and 1939 the tours closely followed the routes of the International Six Days' Trials and, in 1939, in company with the I.S.D.T. competitors, the tourists were forced to return abruptly to England.

In September 1939, the total membership of the I.M.T.C. stood at 450 and it was decided that, for the duration of the war, no further members should be elected. Although the majority of the 450 was soon engaged in war work, either in the Services or in civil life, a still-vigorous skeleton of the once



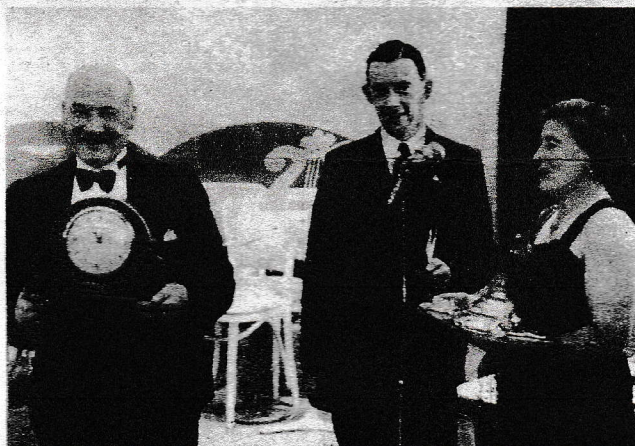
The array of awards presented at the Club's coming-of-age party. The large, carved ashtray on the right was presented to the Club by a Swiss member, Chris Lyss



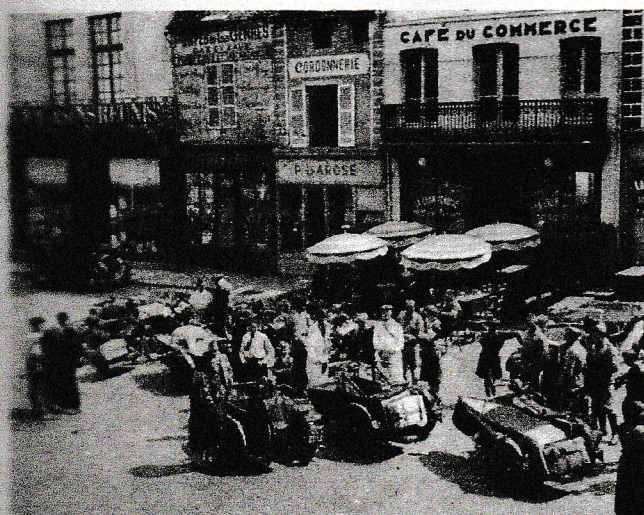
Rhône Valley vista, by club member Alan R. Johnson

full club calendar was retained. Each month, in London and in Manchester, a meeting was held at a member's home, and the only indications at those meetings of the ever-present war were in the drab-coloured uniforms, and the "iron" rations which were the sole levy for an evening's reminiscing. During the war no subscriptions were called for (although donations to help meet the cost of publishing the magazine were invited in mid-1942); the magazine was edited each month in Shaw, Lancashire, and dispatched to members in England and overseas from Charles Middleton's home; an emergency committee of four was authorized to act as signatories, with an additional relief of two members who might be required in the event of "casualties;" and, in defiance of the war and everything else, a New Year's party was held each year in London.

After the war, in 1947, and 1948, partitours were again undertaken, and gradually the strong rhythm of club life began to return to the I.M.T.C.—until, quite suddenly, the meagre



Left to right, Charles Middleton ("Middy"); Lew Poynter, who was treasurer for many years; and Miss I. M. Crow. "Middy" and Miss Crow are holding gifts from club members



A touring party enjoy afternoon coffee in France

dribble of basic-ration petrol was stopped. Then members' motor cycles were stored away and a gentle programme of pedal cycle outings was resumed, a "painful" reminder of the early post-war months. Hiking parties were organized and important events, such as the A.G.M.s at Leicester, were attended by train. But at last petrol was restored and, without a single tear, the pedal cycles were retired from service.

The Club has progressed steadily in recent years: new members who had their first glimpses of foreign countries in Service days have joined and given the Club a wider background; increased facilities have been provided (a circulating library containing reference on touring and kindred subjects is expanding daily); a full cycle of rallies and social meets occupies the months from March to early winter.

In spite of the changes that have occurred in 21 years, the old principles of the Club being a clearing house for ideas and experiences connected with foreign touring, of being devoted, above all, to the further enjoyment of foreign touring, have remained and are, indeed, stronger than ever. A magnificent record!