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# TRIUMPH AT

Never too old to go fast

Approaching the starting line at the Maxton Monster Mile in Maxton, N.C., in my attempt to break a land speed record on Bart Boucher's immaculate 1974 Triumph Trident, it suddenly occurs to me I should ask him about the shift pattern. I know it's on the right, but I'm not sure if it goes up or down.

Noticing the look of terror in his eyes as Bart realizes that in a couple of minutes I'll be accelerating flat out through the gears on a machine I haven't even ridden around the parking lot, I feel his pain. While a ground-shaking rumble explodes into a massive roar and a wild Corvette blasts off down the track, there's no time to rethink the decision as he tickles the Amal carburetors and kickstarts the Trident to life.

Taking the handlebars and hopping into the saddle, I blip the throttle and test the clutch pull. Slipping down into first and hoping the few remaining brain cells orbiting inside my white Arai will remember it's up for the next gear, I ease out the clutch. Jumping forward immediately,





# MAXTON

Story by Neale Bayly

Photos by  
Patrick Bayly  
and Neale Bayly

I make a quick mental note: No clutch travel before engagement. Now I'm sweating, and casually ask if there's a line I should be following and which way the track goes after it disappears behind the foot-high weeds as it veers off to the right. Bart isn't sure about the line, and doesn't look like he's sure he's made a good decision letting me loose on his pride and joy, but before he can change his mind I'm being summoned to the line. Waiting for the track to clear I slide back in the seat, try to familiarize myself with the foot-peg position, and remind myself not to rev the balanced and blueprinted engine past 9,500rpm. And then it's time to go.

## The miles to Maxton

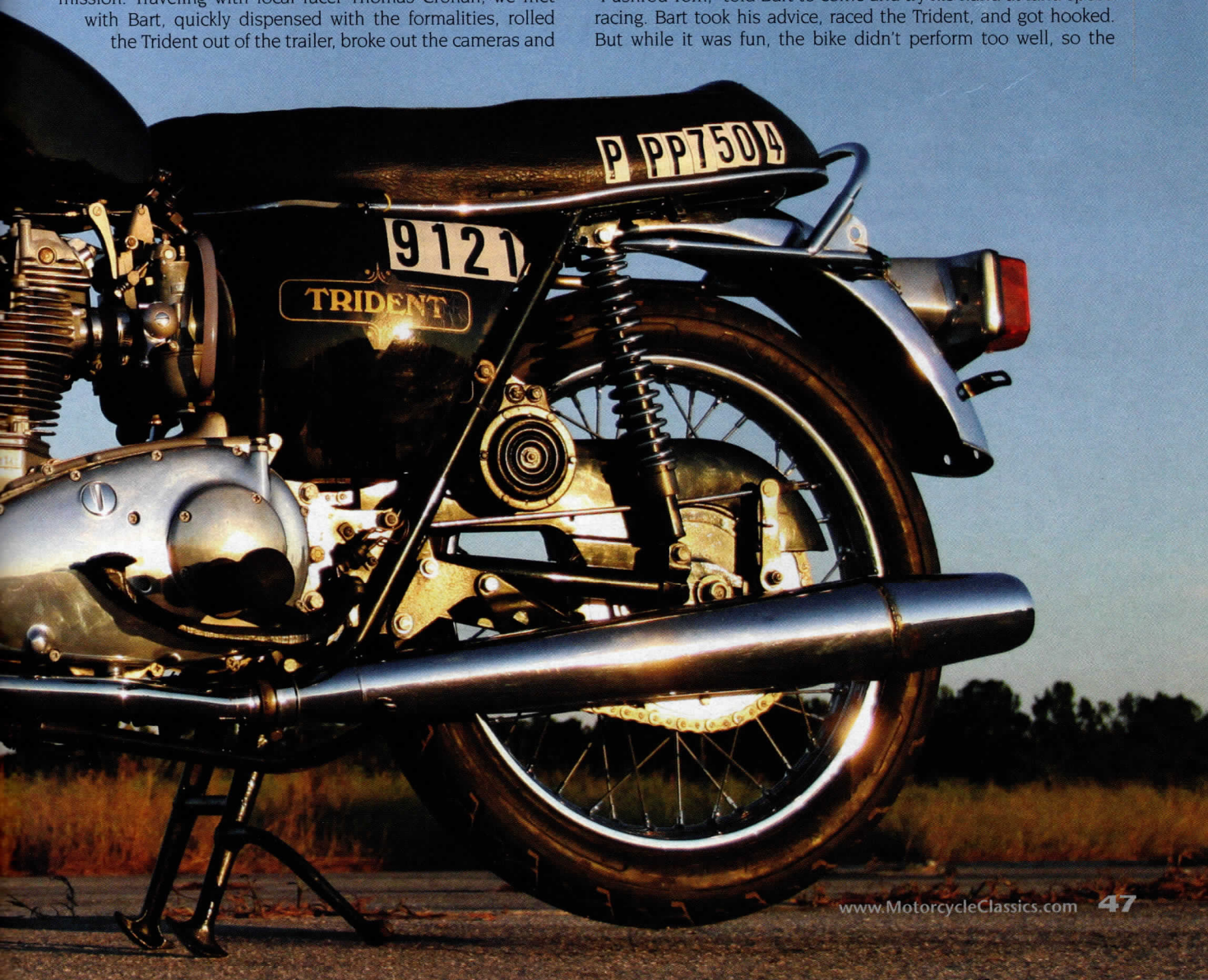
As my son, Patrick, and I arrived at the old Maxton airstrip in North Carolina, the skies that had been heavy with leaden clouds and rain as we traveled east were starting to clear. Within minutes the clouds started to roll out, leaving clear blue sky and a handful of wispy, white clouds hanging around as if maybe Burt Munro himself put in a word with the weather gods for us for this mission. Traveling with local racer Thomas Cronan, we met with Bart, quickly dispensed with the formalities, rolled the Trident out of the trailer, broke out the cameras and

started shooting as the setting sun burned a deep, golden hue on the surrounding countryside. With more rain on the radar for the following day, I wanted to be safe on pictures, at least.

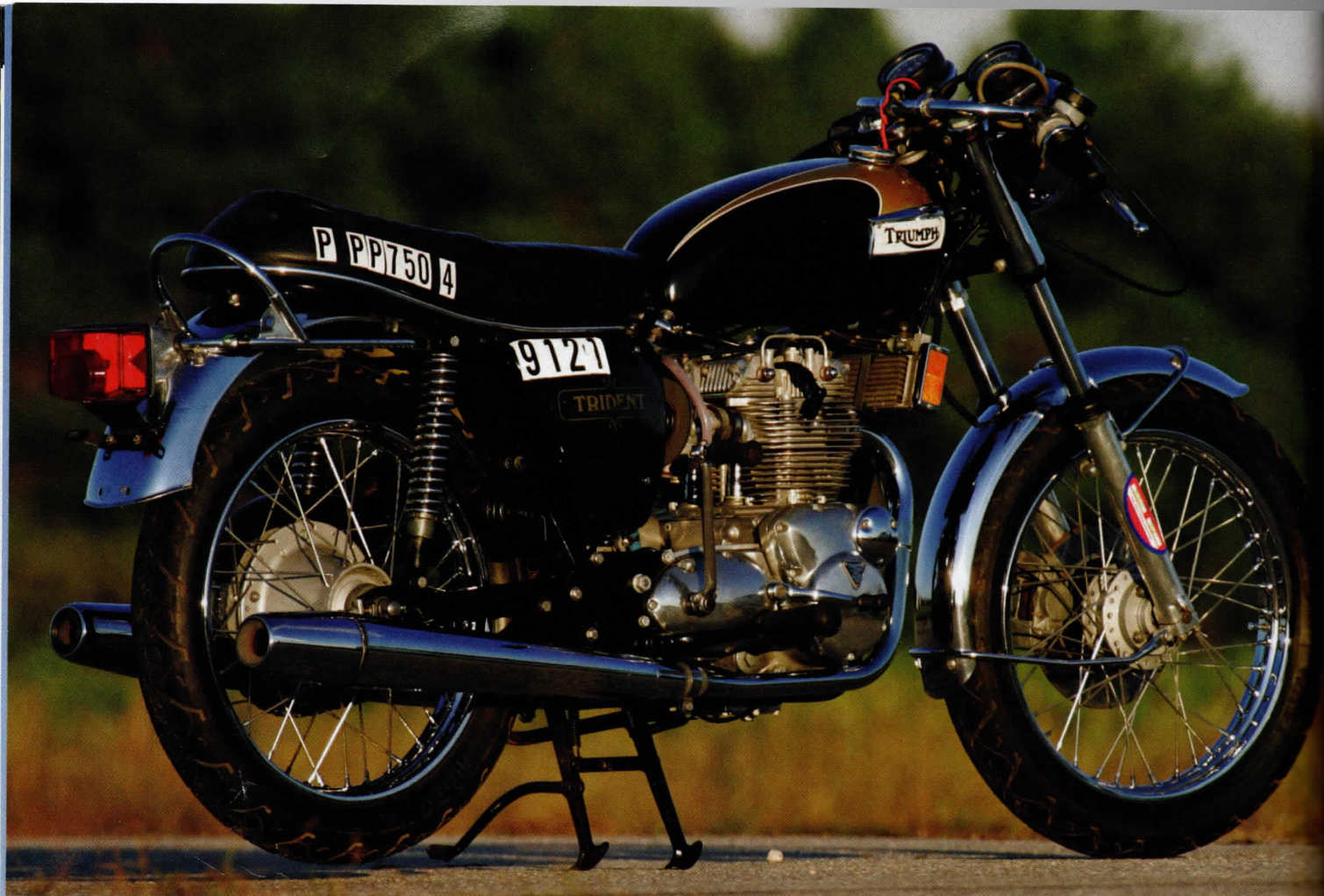
Later, as we sat at dinner, I learned Bart started his personal two-wheeled journey at the tender age of 12 on a Whizzer, before graduating to various Hondas and then a 1972 BSA Lightning he bought new. That started a British love affair that has lasted a few decades, and now sees more than 15 motorcycles back at Boucher Central in Alexandria, Va.

His bikes range from a 1933 BSA Sloper to a 2007 Triumph Tiger, a 1981 Laverda Jota, a 1976 Moto Guzzi T3 and a Triumph Rocket III. And while we could spend the rest of the evening chatting about any one of his collection, it's Bart's 1974 Trident I am here for, and I'm eager to learn about it and his decision to go land speed racing.

Purchased in Daytona four years ago, Bart's original plan was to just ride the Trident, and he told me he had no intention of racing it at that time. That is until a friend from his BSA club, "Pushrod Tom," told Bart to come and try his hand at land speed racing. Bart took his advice, raced the Trident, and got hooked. But while it was fun, the bike didn't perform too well, so the







engine was sent off to Jerry Liggett in California for a rebuild. Here it was blueprinted, the cases were machined for better tolerances, the ports were cleaned up and new stock pistons were installed as the original ones had some broken rings. The crankshaft was lightened and balanced, as were the rocker arms, and the bike picked up about 15 horsepower for a total of 65. The original carburetors were overhauled and re-jetted to run without air filters, and the baffles were removed from the stock exhausts.

The engine was slipped back into the frame, and the bike was ready to go racing. A few external modifications were made, but other than taping up the headlight, removing the turn signals and adding some Ace bars, there was not much else to do. From the frame to the tank, the bike is mostly stock and original, including the suspension and even the wheels. I asked Bart if these had been upgraded for racing, and he told me all he did was install Avon race tires and run them at 45psi.

Bart set a land speed record in a pushrod production class at 116mph, but he is a big lad, and try as he might, he had about reached his top-speed potential on the Trident. Still curious to see what the Trident could do, he enlisted the help of "Pushrod Tom" Cronan, who at 125 pounds soaking wet and fearless on a motorcycle was the perfect person to help answer his question. With taller gearing on

a 1.5-mile runway at Loring, Maine, Thomas took a new record at 129mph — really flying for a basically stock 1974 machine.

#### Getting in on the mile

Over the next year, Bart and Thomas spent some enjoyable weekends tearing up and down the Maxton Mile on the Trident before Thomas came up with the idea of my riding it to see if I could break a record. Thomas has been racing since he was 15 years old, and was actually at Maxton when I raced my one and only time there. I was hanging out writing some stories about a

mad group of guys headed up by Scott Guthrie, the man known as "The Sultan of Speed." On the day I met Thomas for the first time, Scott put me on a nitrous-oxide injected Suzuki Hayabusa, and now I'm in the 200mph club.

Thankfully, Thomas was able to convince Bart I could be trusted with his pride and joy — even if I didn't know which way the gears shifted — and we all met to see if it could add a vintage land speed record to my existing one.

Looking through the Maxton record book, they found an old record of 109mph in a modified, partial stream-lined, pushrod, blown, gas class for 750cc four-stroke machines. We could, we discovered, enter in that class, as Bart's Triumph technically slots into a lower class. On the surface



There were some nice classics on hand at the run, including this lovely Triumph Bonneville with TT pipes.



Although treated to a comprehensive engine overhaul, the 1974 Triumph Trident T150 used for the run is basically stock.



it seemed like it should be an easy task, but I still had to execute a near-perfect run to top this. Bart told me on stock gearing I would need to run for the mile, as the bike hadn't been able to top 120mph with Thomas on board. Doing the math, I realized I am about 60 pounds heavier and much taller, with a lot less skill, so maybe it might not be that academic after all?

#### Time to run

Unlike drag racing or road racing, when the starter says "Go" on the Maxton Mile you don't have to immediately launch from the line, so I take an extra breath, slip the clutch while revving the engine to a point where I hope it won't stall, and blast off down the World War II runway in search of glory. Rolling up through first gear, I scoot back as far as I can, and, straining to bend my body behind the gauges, realize I haven't checked which one is the tachometer. Knowing I need to shift around 9,000 to 9,500rpm to keep the 37-year-old engine from turning into a hand grenade, I see the needle hit its mark just in time and shift up into second. It grabs second as perfectly as any modern Japanese bike, and the surge of acceleration is extremely respectable from such an old machine, as is the addictive mix of engine and exhaust noise. Scanning ahead, the bumpy surface has me bouncing around on the seat as second becomes third, and shifting into fourth, I finally locate the timing boxes ahead in the distance.

Pushing the tachometer to 9,500rpm, I try to shrink myself

down even more as the bars dance in my hands. I work overtime to not back out to calm things down and select fifth gear. Feeling as if someone is gently pushing me backwards, I try in vain to wring the throttle further open as the bike struggles to move the tachometer needle over 7,000rpm. I engage in some weird inner dialogue about whether I can get the bike to accelerate any more before the timing lights, and all the hectic action of the past minute seems to slow almost to a standstill as I listen intently for the sound of the engine picking up speed. Remembering a mistake I made here last time — when I rolled off the throttle at 206mph after going by the first timing light, reducing my record to 202.247 mph — I hold the throttle wide open until well beyond the second light.

In the movies, I would have rolled off the throttle and sat up, punching the air in a salute to the adoring crowd as a Hollywood starlet playing the devoted little woman waited with my trophy. Well, in the ongoing day-late-and-a-dollar-short adventures of this penniless scribe, I hold the throttle a little too long. Going to apply the brakes I can't find the rear pedal with my foot, and instead grab the throttle cable as it's where I think the front brake lever should be. Thinking it might have been a good idea to check where the brakes were before riding the bike, I look over to see



Neale Bayly readies for his run alongside a Suzuki Hayabusa (left). Trident owner Bart Boucher and Bayly at run's end (right).



a couple of very surprised track marshals watching a vintage motorcycle fly past the first exit road. I roll on down to the second exit and head sheepishly back to the scoring tent to see if we have a record.

The next few minutes are among the best I've had in 35 years of motorcycling, as Bart arrives with his lovely wife and my son, Patrick, to collect my record and celebrate. We have done it, with a final speed of 114.345mph. While it was a little down on the Trident's true potential, it was achieved with just one mile of experience on the bike as I hit the traps, which says a lot about Bart's superb machine. It was so easy to ride, shifted incredibly sweetly, and made really excellent power for a machine of its age.

Making my way back to the starting line for a second run,



A headlight cover and race class identifiers are basically the only clues pointing to the Triumph's race-prepped status.

where I pushed my record out to 117mph, I wished we could have added in a road test, as the sound and feel of the three-cylinder engine at more sane speeds is intoxicating. It isn't to be, and I have to be content with meeting one of the nicest people you could imagine and riding one of the finest vintage bikes I've had the privilege to swing a leg over. Now all I have to do is convince Bart he needs to let me road race his Rob North-framed Trident next

year when he gets it finished. Should be fun! **MC**

*Editor's note: Neale Bayly's run at Maxton was one of the last made before the East Coast Timing Association had to abandon racing there, following 18 years of speed trials at the World War II-era runway. The last weekend of racing was Oct. 29-30, 2011. Bayly made his run September 23.*

