



# Thunderbird Times

September 2009

Newsletter of the Mighty South London branch of the **TRIUMPH** Owners Motor Cycle Club

Having been away for a couple of weeks, I missed the club run, the Haslemere run, & the Devon weekend. Nobody has come up with anything on these yet, except Martin, who won a free MOT with 10% off a service. As this has to be used by the end of October & is at a garage in Aldershot, he doesn't particularly want it, and it's on offer to anybody who could use it. If anybody is interested, let me know & I'll pass it on to Martin.

At the Bonneville 50th I met that most elusive member of our branch, Erum Waheed. If you keep up with things in Nacelle, you will have seen Erum's efforts to get a Blue Plaque installed in the south London area in recognition of Edward Turner's contributions to the motorcycle world. Well, it's finally going to happen. The unveiling will be at 2pm on Sunday, 25th October. There will be a congregation at Peckham Rye before moving onto 8 Philip Walk for the unveiling. It would be good if we, as the South London branch, can get a good turnout. Erum included a piece that may be of interest, I've included it at the end.

**Probably the best spaghetti  
in the world.....**



## EVENTS:

Tuesday 6th October - Members BBQ, P.o.W.  
Saturday 24th October - Kempton Park  
Sunday 25th October - Edward Turner plaque unveiling - details later.

## THE CLUB:

Meets at the Princess of Wales, **98 Morden Road, London SW19 3BP**  
(020 8542 0573) every Tuesday from 8.30 pm  
Runs leave the pub at 8.00pm sharp, 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month, April to Sept.  
Please ensure you have a full tank of petrol.

## CLUB CONTACTS:

<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Mog Pharoah</b>	<b>020 8947 7727</b> (day)
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Malcolm Orpin</b>	<b>020 8640 2608</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Doddie Kent</b>	<b>020 8660 5227</b>
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	<b>Dave Kent</b>	<b>Ditto</b>
<b>Show Secretary</b>	<b>John Flower</b>	<b>020 8942 9976</b>
<b>TT Editor</b>	<b>Mal Orpin</b>	<a href="mailto:malcolm.orpin@talktalk.net">malcolm.orpin@talktalk.net</a>
<b>Social Secretary</b>	<b>Bob Simmonds</b>	<b>020 8669 0921</b>
<b>Runs Leader</b>	<b>Brian Peters</b>	<b>01737 551762</b>
<b>Regalia</b>	<b>Robin Maynard</b>	<b>020 8224 7421</b>
<b>Website Administrator</b>	<b>Dave Liddbury</b>	<a href="mailto:lidders@lidders.fsnet.co.uk">lidders@lidders.fsnet.co.uk</a>



From left: A vintage Turner Triumph rally (Mark Baynes/Rex Features); Chepstow Motors (Veloce Publishing); a vintage Ariel advert (Erum Waheed); Edward Turner at his home (Veloce Publishing); Turner with Rita Hayworth on a Triumph (Veloce Publishing); an Ariel sign still visible in Kennington today (Erum Waheed). Jeff Clew's *Edward Turner: The Man Behind the Motorcycles* (Veloce, £17.99) is out now. Order on 01305 260068 or at [www.veloce.co.uk](http://www.veloce.co.uk)

# Turner and the Triumph

Lewis Bowman reports on the local genius behind the Triumph motorcycle

It's one of the most memorable images in all of cinema: a young, dark-haired man in denim and black leather leans against the front of a motorcycle, his handsome face topped with a peaked cap and split by the merest suggestion of a smirk, one arm draped casually across the gleaming handlebars like the paw of a predatory lion.

The young man, of course, was Marlon Brando; the film *The Wild One*, and very few of us can be numb to the sense that famous image still conjures – a sense of rebellion and anti-authoritarian vitality that, at the time of release in 1953, was potent enough to foment fears of actual rebellion among American teenagers.

But Marlon Brando wasn't the film's only star. The motorcycle on which he leans in the famous photograph was as crucial a part of the movie's rock 'n' roll aesthetic – not to mention its plotline, about feuding biker gangs – as the brooding hero himself, and even the promotional tagline ("Marlon Brando! Driven Too Far By His Own Hot Blood!") seems to suggest as much. The bike in the film, as it happens, was Brando's own, a 1950 Triumph Thunderbird 6T made – like

Triumph's then-rivals in the emergent British motorcycle market.

The engine Turner designed was well received, and he was relocated to Ariel's Midlands headquarters, where on their acquisition of Triumph in 1936 he was put in charge of the latter firm. Soon afterwards he designed and produced the legendary Speedtwin 5T bike, marking the start of decades of Triumph success. Turner's design savvy and marketing nous – as well as his infamous 'tight ship' approach to management – reinvigorated the Triumph marque and made it the world leader in motorcycle manufacture, as well as an enduring 20th century design icon, until his death in 1973.

Triumph's legend, however, is not bound to the past. Despite controversial plant changes and financial problems which blighted the company through the late 1970s and 80s, the brand, the bikes and their reputation have survived. In 2000 the company re-launched its legendary Bonneville design to wide acclaim, and in September this year a Triumph Daytona 675 took first place at the Sound of Thunder Championship at Pembrey in Wales. Local links also

Motor Cycle Club, is spearheading the initiative.

"Near where I work in central London is a blue plaque celebrating a clown," he says. "Somehow, it didn't seem right that while a clown was commemorated, nothing had been done for the captains of the British motorcycle industry, whose designs led the world until the 1970s. Even more so for the Triumph marque which, through essentially one man's design, marketing and leadership, so dominated the biggest world market, the United States."

Support for the campaign has come from various quarters – not least from Danny Defazio, contributor to *Classic Bike* magazine and a Triumph fan, whose letter of support to Southwark Council's Blue Plaques Nominations Committee spoke of "Turner's design flair and marketing instincts [being] an integral part of the Great British Experience. His designs are unarguably up there with the E-Type Jaguar, the Harrier Jump Jet, the Concorde, the Spitfire fighter [and] Gilbert Scott's K6 telephone kiosk."

The last word is perhaps best left to the nation that assimilated Turner's vision so readily – the US. The leading motorcycle magazine there, *Cycle World*,

all Triumphs of the period – at the company's Meriden plant in the West Midlands. But the bike's origins actually stretched a lot farther south than that – to Walworth, in fact, and the home of British engineering and design legend Edward Turner.

Turner was born in 1901 in Bronte Place and went on to live on Rye Hill Park in Peckham. His first notable professional foray into the world of motorcycle manufacture came during his time as owner of Chepstow Motors on Peckham Road, when he designed a four-cylinder engine for Ariel –

remain; at Herne Hill Velodrome the bikes used for speed testing are all Turner Triumphs, and opposite the Dog House pub on Kennington Lane an old painted Ariel advertisement still gazes down from the brickwork above the street. In addition, a plan has been gathering pace in recent months to increase local people's awareness of the area's links to the Triumph story, by calling on Southwark Council to place a commemorative Blue Plaque on Edward Turner's former home. Erum Waheed, a barrister, Dulwich resident and member of the Triumph Owners

wrote of the Triumph that "it was a cultural icon, an English machine that, even in its time, somehow became as much a part of the American scene as James Dean, '51 Mercs and Lucky Strikes. It was the motorcycle of choice among rock stars, tough guys and counterculture heroes. Owning a Triumph in those heady times was a sort of automatic entree into that circle of people who understood. It was a machine you had to have."

Not a bad achievement for a boy from Peckham whose first design was on the back of a cigarette packet. ■