

# 'MORNING SESSION' by "ALBANY"

**T.T. race week is the enthusiast's paradise—but the practice period has an excitement all its own**

**M**ONA'S ISLE!—the very name reeks of road racing; it conjures up vistas of moorland roads, quiet now, and of the sea. Of kippers and Manx kings; of fairies and tailless cats with long hare-like hind legs. To some it may be lazy days recalled at Laxey, Peel, Douglas, or a farm during the more seasonal holiday weeks of the year. But to the true follower of motorcycling sport, it means much more—much, much more in a certain week in June.

If you have never been "across," as the Manx people put it, you haven't lived, racewise at any rate. Oh, I know all about that epic scrap at Oulton or Brands or Cadwell between Mac and Minter or Minter and the M.V. or any other of the many absolute top flight (and otherwise) riders at large these days; but let's face it, this is short-circuit stuff, however good it undoubtedly is to watch and I know I am not alone when I merely remark "There is no early morning practising!"

The scene can be any Douglas hotel or boarding-house bedroom; the alarm clock, for such it *must* be, ticks on, on towards the set hour which, for most of us, means around 4.15 a.m.; outside the sky is dark, the moon may still be shining, as are the stars. It is quiet apart from the sound of the surf on the deserted beach.

After the initial shock and the inevitable struggle with the clanging intruder into your dreams, the form is get out of bed immediately—not to do so is, to me, fatal. I could recall many such mornings when the next thing I've heard was the breakfast gong at about 8.30! Up then! Peer through the curtains at the chilly dawn—and then put your head under the cold tap! Don all the jerseys you have, your suit or coat (not forgetting your trousers and boots), helmet and gloves and, if you have organized things, or stay at an enthusiastic abode, creep below and make a quick cuppa in the kitchen with the things left out by request the night before.

## Up to the Course

You will notice a freshness on Douglas promenade at this hour, a feeling of *joie-de-vivre* as, under a sky now showing signs of the dawn, you hear the first distant rumbling notes of some backstreet Norton being ridden up to the start and the isolated scream of a gull already wheeling expectantly over the Bay. On past the old Gaiety Theatre, which will no doubt still be showing George Formby's T.T. classic "No Limit" long after Mike Hailwood has permanently retired; on past the "Villa" and up Broadway—the scene of pre-war car racing—to Willaston cross-roads.

I would suggest, however, that you now retrace your way, and turn into Noble's Park, past the flower beds and deserted café (watch the sharp left-hander here) until across the fields you will see the great banners and tyre ads, erected on the back of the Grandstand, which incidentally are visible miles out at sea.

At this hour you will find no undue difficulty in walking into the pit area and, when you get into the hallowed spot, you have arrived! No sight or sound will ever replace those you now witness. In the now sunlit morning you could behold the giants of the sport at their business; here would be seen Geoff Duke, still keen as mustard although back with his old love a Norton, albeit a privateer. Time was when he would be present on a works edition of this marque; in attendance there would have been Joe Craig, Harold Daniell, Johnny Lockett and Artie Bell.

Later, the Gilera would be there, accompanied by the *maestri* and thus the Italians would have come upon the scene. There is John Surtees surrounded by blue overalled attendants as a mechanic starts the big M.V. and the overture begins . . . quietly contemplating the rev. counter of his machine sits Bob McIntyre, the first man to cover the Manx lap at 100 m.p.h. officially; by the fence putting on his gloves is ever-wisecracking Dickie Dale; Minter, Shepherd, Hailwood—these are the men you have come to see.

Nowadays you will get close-up views of hitherto unseen "foreign menaces"—the East German M.Z. or Japanese Hondas immacu-



lately turned out and here to continue their startling apprenticeship which, we shall see, may lead to bigger things in years ahead.

But enough . . . reluctantly you tear yourself away from this feast, pick up the bike and ride out of the Park, across the main road and down to the foot of Bray to await the first away. . . .

A distant roar of machinery can be heard . . . someone mutters "They're off" and seconds later Mike Hailwood starts the proceedings, warming everyone up as his machine snakes in the dip . . . the policeman shakes his head. You know better (or think you do). Total strangers now talk to you as if old friends, blabbering about Minter; you begin to explain that in fact it was Mike, actually; when Surtees whistles through. That stops everyone talking for at least two seconds.

Apart from Bray you may at this stage proceed through the town and obtain a pew at Quarter Bridge for a few minutes, from here a quick run will bring you to Braddan Bridge, whilst if you arrived early enough at the top of Bray before the roads were closed you could concentrate on riding to Union Mills, on return leaving the bike and crossing the course by way of the bridge and returning to the Grandstand and the Paddock.

I would strongly recommend a copy of the one-inch Ordnance Survey map of the Isle of Man and a careful study will prove invaluable in helping you to plan these practice excursions. Although it is somewhat farther, it is also possible to travel to Hillberry whilst "training" is in progress and this fast right-hander is, believe you me, well worth the trip. Whatever you do, a return to the Paddock area after practice, or better still, during it, will prove most interesting, particularly if you witness such things as Surtees screaming down the Glencrutchery Road, cutting the engine and pulling in to change from "350" to "500."

Surtees says "All O.K." and is gone—seconds before the morning session ends as the red flag is waved to signal to all competitors "Everybody in" and another valuable lap is gained. These are the incidentals which you should try to catch.

As you wander round the Paddock after all practice has ceased, you may study at close quarters just what is meant by a few fast laps of this gruelling course—an oil-soaked rear tyre; slack chains, etc., although these days a modern, expertly prepared machine appears very little worse for wear, externally at any rate, than when it started and such items are the exception.

At the end of the pit area interesting and sometimes ominous announcements are put up on a blackboard relating to riders who have had to pull up en route due either to mechanical trouble or otherwise—the early morning sun being a particular hazard in the Sulby area due to its rays shining full into riders' eyes at that point.

Your first practice is not yet done, however. After leaving the course proceed down Broadway (now surprisingly warmer than on your first passage!). An early morning café will advertise itself by the knot of bikes parked beside its doors and hot buttered toast and a welcome tea is yours together with a discussion of the morning's doings. Everyone is happy—*it's* started: "Where shall we go for this evening's session" is the topic. The milkmen are about, maids will probably be washing your hotel steps as you enter, thankful that you made it and that you were not awakened by that breakfast gong.

You know, I can't decide even yet whether I prefer practice week to race week; these early sessions have a unique attraction and if I was unfortunate in having only one week's holiday . . . well, sample it and decide for yourselves!