

## **Out of the Western Sunset – January '10**

### ***Jim Forster's Story***

In this autumn edition I give some of our younger HM readers an insight into what to expect if they are fortunate enough to become a 92 year veteran of motorcycling. The veteran I am referring to is AAR member Jim Forster.

It was a cool Friday morning as I began my trip north from Australind to Perth, 180k's and about one 'n' and a half hours ahead. The journey made so much more pleasant now that the new Forrest highway / Kwinana Freeway is open linking the two cities – Bunbury and Perth. The previous route had you negotiating the mid way Mandurah traffic with a stop start, stop start at traffic signals and the ever increasing vehicle volume. You could actually say Mandurah is now more or less a southern suburb of Perth as there is not much natural vegetation between them any more.

That cool morning air was not to last, with temperatures in the metro area expected in the mid 30's. I was looking forward to finishing my business commitments then directing the car toward Safety Bay – Jim's residence and the cooler under croft of his garage beneath the house. I had telephoned him earlier in the week to make sure he would be home. You know how these pensioner's are...never home. "I'll make sure I'm home and looking forward to your visit" was his reply.

Now on our first meeting a few months back, Jim was very apologetic that there was no "cuppa" available. "The Coffee maker is on permanent strike" he said with a giggle. Chloe, his wife of some 54 years had passed on, and as he put it, "I'm not much good at making Coffee". With this in mind, I told him not to worry about the coffee, I'll get us a couple of Muzz Buzz take aways as I pass through Rockingham, a nearby suburb minutes away.

By this time it was just after mid day and as I pulled into the drive, Jim was in the garage manufacturing a timber frame work for his "T" model ragtop. Several layers of marine ply with epoxy resin holding it all together. I had arrived in time to aide with the holding procedure so as he could clamp the whole unit and allow to set. With this out of the way, a wash up then sit back to enjoy the coffee. A proud man of his machines, he had them all uncovered and sparkling in the diffused light of the garage. Available for my inspection again, that of which I obliged.

It didn't take much to get Jim chatting, His age was one of the first things that I confirmed, 92 years young. As many old timers of Jim's vintage tell me, "keep your mind fit and be active" is the success to longevity. In Jim's words "Keep your motor running". He has done this since 1929 at age 11 when he first started a motorcycle.

In the days of growing up on his parent's Kellerberrin farm with his brother and sister life was tough and all had to pull their weight. Jim didn't start school till he was 10 and soon made friends with kids from nearby farms. One particular young lad, Leon, use to ride a pushbike to the school. This somewhat annoyed Jim as he and his siblings had to walk the long distance from their farm. After some time of "Buttering up" his new found mate, he finally talked Leon into selling him the bike. 3 pounds was the going rate and he managed to gather up the funds from Mum and Dad to pay the lad. Proud as punch he rode it home to waiting parents. There was however to be a catch. With the pushbike he could now get to school quicker than his brother and sister. So as to balance this time factor and in return for the payment of the pushbike his father gave Jim the morning job of chopping a load of wood for the days use. "Bugger it " he said, "but it was worth it, til"..... a few days later when he arrived at school, and to his surprise, here is Leon skiting a motorcycle, a belt drive *Triumph*.

This was much to Jim's dismay, and even more so when Leon told him how much he had paid – 3 pounds. Well, that just rubbed salt into the wound. This, at aged 11 was the beginning of Jim's affinity with motorcycles.

Now Leon was no mechanic and having a mate who was very good at fixing things, due to his farm up bringing made a good partnership, as the *Triumph* failed for whatever reason Jim was called upon to weave his magic. "Simple things" as he said, "Fouled plug, dirty points etc." Young Leon had no idea. After some time of these repairs going on, Jim asked the question, or more so stated. "I fix the bloody thing for you, how about you let me ride it." Leon felt this was fair request and duly let Jim have a ride. After a few quick instructions on how to run and start the machine, stop it and so on, off Jim went, like a bat out of hell.

Now with this valuable experience behind him, he approached one of the farm hands who just happened to ride a *Douglas* to the work. Some more sweet talking and "wallah." With 3000 acres on his parents property there was plenty of area to ride. After spending as much spare time as he could riding up and down, Jim then parked the *Douglas* and proceeded to brush the tyre tracks away with branches to hide them, just to play it safe with his father, whom Jim didn't think would be too impressed with him riding a motorcycle.

At age of 16 Jim's father, who incidentally knew Jim had gained a little riding experience, had now resigned to the fact that his boy was a motorcycle lover and presented Jim with a 2 ¼ hp Ohv *BSA*, second hand, but that didn't fuss Jim. It was his own motorcycle. As he blasted off in a cloud of dust he recalls dad yelling out, "Now take it easy son, we can't have you falling off and hurting yourself." As he rode back to his waiting father he could see the expression on his face, and he then uttered the words, "Jim, where the hell did you learn to ride like that?" "Well it's like this Dad..."

With this motorcycle, Jim thought, why can't we use it to round up our 2000 or so head of sheep? Much easier than by foot or uncomfortable horse back. The rest of the family weren't too sure about this wild idea. Concerned the noise and general appearance would spook the sheep. It didn't take them long to realise the benefits and before Jim knew it, dad had purchased a 2 stroke *James* to ride himself. Of course now-a-days no farm is without a motorcycle or two. Jim likes to think he was a bit of a pioneer of this form of sheep and cattle round up.

After much pleasure of the *BSA*, Jim decided to acquire his own motorcycle on his own merits, and did so in the form of a 500cc *Ivory Calthorp*. This would be his mode of transport until in 1938 when he joined the army. At this time with war looming and funds limited the Government called upon service personnel to supply a means of transport that could be used in the event of conflict. For the use of privately owned machines the Government would pay the owner a hire fee of 3 pounds a week. Jim thought, no worries I've got my

*Ivory Calthorp*, that will suffice. Not to be. The authorities scoffed at this little known motorcycle, forcing him to dispose of it and then parting with 99 pound 10 he purchased his first *VB Ariel*, a motorcycle that the army were happy to pay the hire fee for. Like the *M20 BSA*, later the *WM20's* and *Norton's* they were a good old slogging side valve with little engine maintenance required. These Government payments soon had the original purchase debt starting to balance out.

1939 and Jim decide to quit the army in favour of wings, enlisting in the RAAF and leaving the *Ariel* at home on the farm. Soon after, he was to discover that his beloved *VB* had been purchased outright by the War Department, paying his family a measly

60 pounds, well below its worth. This was a common occurrence across the country as the War Department bought up any machine of valuable use, motorcycles and vehicles guns, anything. It was either placed it into service or sent it to scrap to be melted down to manufacture as weapons and other ordinances. Jim's *VB Ariel* probably made it past the scrap heap, but he will never know.

In 1945 he was discharged from the air force and immediately began searching for another *VB Ariel*, This particular model were few and far between, with none available at the local Perth *Ariel* agent "Bays Motorcycles" in Hays Street. The best they could supply was an ex army *Indian*. "A piece of S\*\*\*\*" as Jim put it, but it had two wheels only, so it was acceptable.

The 50's decade approached and after a non related motorcycle accident Jim wound up in hospital. Here he met a sweet young nurse, Chloe, and in 1951 they wed. The next stage of Jim's life did not involve motorcycles, mainly because Chloe's family were not overly keen on the two wheeled form of transport. So in this case for Jim, loved ruled over passion.

As Jim spoke to me of his in-laws hate for motorcycles it brought back a memory or two. He explained, back then the fairer sex's parent's were not to keen on young Fella's who rode motorcycles. "We were considered to be of a bad breed" he told me. This being the case, things were a bit light on when it came to coercing with the ladies. There was one particular female that crossed his path. This pretty and not to shy lass invited him around to meet her parents. Jim thinking this is looking good, smartened himself in his Sunday best and astride his motorcycle pulled up along side this rather immaculate house with its white picket fence. He had no sooner stepped of the motorcycle and to his horror, there on the front veranda stood her mother waving a rather large broom about and hollering obscenities at him. Needless to say, he was not sweeping away the cobwebs and dust. Jim hastily remounted his steed and that was the last he saw of her or her family.

The lull in Jim's motorcycling life came to an end during the 60's. Their two children, a son and daughter were now growing up and becoming independent. This gave Jim the time to begin reminiscing of his earlier days of motorcycling. It did not take too many quiet moments in farmyard shed to get the spirit of the past happening again. Having kept a good repour with the local and surrounding farmers he began taking road trips in a Series1 Landrover to districts were he knew there were old motorcycles and or parts spread throughout the paddocks. These became a family day out and was embraced by all. The old and new owners of the properties were grateful to be rid of what then they classed as "Junk". Jim slowly filled his shed with boxes and boxes of motorcycles and parts, including any other machinery he felt was only going to rot where it lay.

In 1974 the family decide it was time to sell the farm and move, Jim opting for a place closer to the sea. His 56 years in the bush setting of Kellerberrin was enough. Time for what folk's now call a "Sea change". They found a nice well established double storey house in Safety Bay, an outer southern suburb of Perth. The upstairs suited to Chloe and Jim fell in love with the large under house garage, plenty of space, he thought for his vast collection of junk. Not quite big enough though to fit the family cars etc. He did some selective thinning and left bits behind at a neighbouring farm. This was no big deal as he still had the option to go and get parts as needed.

They soon made new friends with the local Safety Bay community. Jim recalls a lot of comments that he received as neighbours noticed him transferring all the motorcycle parts to his garage. "What on earth are you going to do with all that stuff?" His reply, "Start building motorcycles"

The majority of his collection was and still is *Ariel's* and *Harley Davidson's*. The *Harley* bug coming from an Uncle who had a 1918 model *Harley Davidson* with an outfit attached. He use to take young Jim and his siblings for rides in the chair. Something that brings back fond memories for him.

Once settled into City living Jim joined the local VMCCWA at number 128. This gave him valuable contacts that would assist him where need be. That wasn't too often, most of his restorations were all done in house, and now retired he had all the time he needed.

One of his first complete finds was that elusive 1939 *VB Ariel* he was chasing early in the picture. This was to be a cheap find \$0.00. It did however cost him \$50.00 for a motor. This was to be his first full restoration.

Then a 500cc *Red Hunter* fell into his lap, this was number two.

In the meanwhile the *Harley Davidson* bits and pieces were rolling in steadily taking up shelf space along side the rest of his *Ariel* collection.

Another *Red Hunter* with a "Bugged motor" as Jim puts it entered the garage. A nearby mate had a 750cc side valve *JAP* motor sitting idle and offered that to Jim for this *Ariel*. I asked him what gave him the thought to fit this much larger engine to the '39, as it would require several significant modifications to be done successfully. Jim's response, "Well, I had always considered doing something unusual like this to a motorcycle and thought it as a challenge."

He continued explaining the procedure to me, the adjustment to the *Ariel* frame front down tube, a bend out actually. This was necessity to accommodate the long V twin engine. Jim's most challenging modification was to be between the engine and original *Ariel* primary drive. This took some calculating so as the drive sprocket to clutch etc would all align true. The *JAP* crank case was considerably narrower than that of the 500 *Ariel* single. Once the time consuming homework was complete he them machined up the alloy spacer and fitted accordingly. The final big challenge was to be the generator. The standard *Ariel* generator tucked in behind the engine, this space now had half a 750cc *JAP* engine there instead. He toyed with different ideas, one being to tilt the angle of the engine at the front to give clearance from the front mud guard allowing for a magdyno set up. This was soon dispatched to the rubbish bin as it did not suit the aesthetics of the *Ariel*. It was decided to run without a generator. The downfall to that being a fully charged battery would be needed on each outing. Once complete the now 'different' looking 1939 *Ariel* was eye catcher amongst the classic motorcycle enthusiasts, as it did to me when I first got a glimpse of it under the sheet covers a few months back.

Jim spoke of another *Ariel* that had a V twin *JAP* fitted, he had seen this several years later. The Chap that put it together had the tilt on the engine as considered by himself. He said it just didn't look right with the front cylinder vertical. So that made Jim satisfied with his fitting.

"I did ride it quite a lot thereafter, but nowadays I admit, I'm getting a bit long in the tooth for riding solos, any of them really." He said. "I do get them out regularly and run them around the block to keep things operational, including me" he continued.

He tells me that his *Harley Davidson* outfits now get his attention. "They have three wheels and I can't fall over on them." Mind you, watching Jim move and drag the machines around the garage, I wouldn't have thought he had an issue with strength or balance. His confidence is very high.

He has 4 *Harley's*, two solos, one a 1930 500cc and a 1926 350cc side valve "Pup". The remaining two have side cars attached. A '42 civilianized ex WD model and a 1935 1200cc V twin side valve. All in solid working order, albeit a little road worn. One must keep in mind that these all came from "Junk" on the farms and nearby rubbish tips, then restored during the 1970's and 80's.

In 1990 Jim and a bunch of fellow Club member's embarked on a trip east across the Nullarbor to Sydney riding their historic machines. The twenty odd riders and passengers ended up travelling 11,000 plus kilometres during the six week ride.

It was all about a re enactment of a journey that took place during 1926. As he said, their trip was a lot more comfortable than that of the original adventurers. The sealed roads and accommodation arrangements well surpassed the 1926 days. With only a few mishaps along the way, all in all it was a great event.

Back in Jim's garage and talk starts of the '35 Harley parked before us.

I made comment as to the size of the attached sidecar. A sidecar that is near on the length of the cycle and as wide. In comment I said, "Gee Jim, is that chair big enough? Are you going to have it used as a coffin for you when you move on or something? " With a laugh he replies "No, no" although, he showed a hint of possibility in his demeanour.

He went on to explain the size factor. It came about when he began showing his machines at various events. After a while taking one motorcycle became a tough decision. What should I take? I could trailer a couple by car, but that wasn't really in the spirit of what motorcycling is about. So out came the drawing board again and lets take up the challenge of designing and building a sidecar. That he did, and the result, a purpose built outfit capable of transporting a complete motorcycle. The tail end drops down allowing access, wheel it up and in, strap it down and off we go. Simple. The only thing it lacks is a brake on the chair wheel. As he said, " I don't go that fast, so it is not a big issue."

In follow on to the 'I don't go that fast' comment, Jim explained that he has never been one for going fast. "I've never had that inclination, and I don't believe in thrashing machinery of any sort." He accepts that it is an individual's choice, but not his one.

This led to some political Club issues. He went on to say that he has found that of late the membership of VMCCWA tend to ride modern machines, and at speed. (Jim's version of modern is 1960 onward. Having majority pre wars, myself I tend to agree.) By speed, he does not mean law breaking, just going and pushing to fast for his pre war models.

For this reason he does not take part in to many Club events these days. I was quick to console him that it is an across the board issue with all Clubs. The Indian Harley Club Bunbury that I am involved with also has a strong problem here. We can have 30-40 machines on average, from pre war to "Super" modern 1980's motorcycles at any given event. This does create a problem.

My answer to Jim comes by the way of, "Ride at your pace, bugger the rest, you won't be pushed along." It's easy to say this, and in my case I do exactly that. But like Jim says, he is 92 years old, most of the Chaps he knew and rode regularly within the Club are now long gone. There is a new breed rider today, and he feels a little intimidated by this. A fair comment.

It is something that will continue to happen as Clubs evolve, and that they must, evolve. Sooner or later, as is happening to "Veteran" machines, they will just be

shoved in the corner of a shed or garage never to be seen again. My fear is that within ten years or so there will not be too many pre war machines on the road.

We (Indian Harley Club, Bunbury) have 3 events per year specifically set and routed for veteran and pre war motorcycles. Something that was strongly supported by Members in a recent Club survey. We are also instigating a policy were by Run organisers set a departure time on nominated speeds. This then allows for the slower motorcycles to gain a head start avoiding congestion of fast and slow machines, and the 'pushing' that Jim talks of.

That's enough of politics, I've run of track a bit here, back to Jim.

Anyhow, we did still have a laugh about a few other political issues, but like my late father use to say, "Never talk politics amongst friends, it can cause animosity." So we'll let that subject be.

One other thing Jim had a laugh about was his recent licence tests. As most are aware, once you reach a particular age there are regular medicals and practical tests to be done. In Western Australia the ripe young age of 75 years is when this begins. Then at 85 years the annual practical tests are a part of life. Jim had no medical woes and has passed all with flying colours

However his recent practicals have had some moments. A couple of years ago he dragged out his 1974 XB Falcon panel van (Original) to use as the test vehicle. A smart move he thought as he knew the car. He tells me, the examiner was a young Chap, who he estimates was struggling to be 30 years of age at the most. In Jim's words, "Not even born when the car he was sitting in was made." Off they went, Jim driving, the examiner then requested him to turn left, that of which Jim did. "Next thing," he says, "The Bugger is ticking a failure on the left turn. What's that for? I asked" "You took it to wide". The swift and sarcastic reply from the examiner. Jim said, "I then snapped back. Well I haven't got power steering like you blokes do".

In the end that was the only flaw in that practical and Jim was given his licence for another year.

The following year and the practical comes round again. Jim figures I'll use the Falcon this year too. He fronts up for the test, "Low and behold, here is the same young Chap" he says. Off they go again, "Left turn here please" being the request. So Jim proceeds to turn left. Remembering the previous year's incident, he decides he'll take the corner a little tighter. In doing so, "Damn" Jim said, "You wouldn't read about it, I hit the bloody curb, didn't I?"

The result being a tick of failure. Jim went on to say, "When the fella chastised me for it , I said, well, last time you told me I went to wide, so I figure this time I'll go the other way."

Anyway, again there were no more penalties so Jim has continued driving. Now though they (DPI - Dept. Planning and Infrastructure) insist that he does a practical on a motorcycle. During last years exam he rode the '35 *Harley Davidson*. As the examiner walked to the *Harley*, he made comment as to where are your indicators? Jim replied with a wave of his arms, "Here they are." Disgruntled with Jim's rely and attitude the examiner proceeds with the test. When they returned Jim was given the results, with a failure on the use of hand signals. When asked why he failed, the examiner went on to say that the duration of the signal was insufficient. Much to Jim's disapproval, he again responded, " Well I can't take my hands of the handle bars for too long can I? I have to steer and brake somehow." Saying that he then thought better not push my luck, and let it be. Result, he got his licence back.

Jim figures at 92 they've got it in for him and will throw anything at him that may make him change his mind to give up the licence. "That's not going to happen." He said "I watched the fella over the road quit driving. Less than 2 years later he was dead."

By now we had been sitting chatting for 3 hours, the resin on the "T" model ragtop frame was set. It was about time I headed south for home. I could have stayed as there was plenty more to gasbag about, but that can be on my next visit..

The general historic scene in WA settles throughout April to June with no high profile events as such.

The IHC has 7 Runs calendared. One which I would recommend is the *Webby's Memorial*, June 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> long weekend. This is a three day ride through the picturesque Karri forests of the South West with regular stops at local farms. These farms have an interesting array of memorabilia dating back to the early 1900's showing the history of the district. The accommodation is a swag it style, again in local farm sheds. A very sociable event.

Further details on IHC runs can be obtained from the web site.

[www.ihcvintagemotorcycles.asn.au](http://www.ihcvintagemotorcycles.asn.au)

The VMCCWA have regular events, check web for details.

[www.vmccwa.com](http://www.vmccwa.com)

The Historic Competition Motorcycle Club begin their season of racing at Collie Motorplex on the Easter weekend

[www.historicracing.asn.au](http://www.historicracing.asn.au)

A visit to the WA Motor Museum at Whiteman Park is always worth it.

Opening hours and details available from the web site.

[www.motormuseumofwa.asn.au](http://www.motormuseumofwa.asn.au)

Till next issue,

See you in the Western Sunset,

Bolt