



Road-Tester Tom Allen sets out, past a consignment of Matchless and A.J.S. machines, en-route for another "works mileage" run on one of the new 250 Matchless's. He covers over 750 miles every week of the year in this exacting and important role

## A "MATCHLESS" QUALITY

**W**HEN a firm can proudly boast that it has the "longest unbroken record of motor cycle manufacture in the world"; produced the winning machine of the first I.O.M. T.T.; has grown from strength to strength over the years so that the original concern now embraces four other highly successful manufacturers as well, and can point to many men who have served them faithfully for forty years or

The author (left) talks to "young" veteran Bert Colver who has been with the Plumstead "Matchless" concern for over 60 years. P.R.O. Mike Marriott smiles his approval



more; then somewhere behind the gleaming, brightly painted, chromium plated output of popular and sportingly successful motor cycles there is a reason for all this.

It was to try and discover the secret of success that I made an appointment a few days before Christmas with Associated Motor Cycles' Sales Director and former racing man, "Jock" West.

"Come tomorrow," he said over the 'phone, but a road accident and ensuing considerable traffic blockage en route caused me to be late for my scheduled 10.30 a.m. date.

The unimposing looking frontage in Plumstead Road, South East London, presents a deceptive facade to the vast suite of offices and expanse of factory. Graciously, "Jock" waved aside my apologies as he led me to his office.

I should really prefer to call it a "den". Trophies, pictures and flags, insignia of success, give the spacious room that air of friendliness, despite the presence of a large desk stacked high with letters and photographs, and the business-like array of telecommunication switches near at hand.

It was soon obvious from his conversation that pride of association with the motor cycle industry was one of the keynotes to the answer to my quest. In giving me a background picture of the works and its personnel, "Jock" spoke of the "family spirit" that still prevailed—a legacy of the days when a Mr. H. H. Collier started to make "Matchless" pedal cycles which were later raced by his two elder sons, Harry and Charlie and one H. V. "Bert" Colver—of whom more later.

Men in all departments of the factory—and there are 1,200 of them—from the Boardroom downwards are not only employees, but active motor cyclists. This common bond was a platform in which all could meet on equal terms.

As if to illustrate this point, "Jock" called in the Press Relations Officer, Michael Marriott, an adventurous

*A machinist carries out facing, turning and drilling of a crankcase half-casting. All three operations are carried out on the one machine.*



by **PETER ARNOLD**

character who has written a best selling book of his trip in a London taxi across the Sahara desert, and is currently awaiting publication of his overland journey around Australia and back with a scooter and sidecar.

Mike was to be my guide for the next five hours as we toured the factory seeing and meeting a host of interesting people—people who are the backbone of the industry, about whom little is written, but who shape and mould the destiny and goodwill of successful motor cycle manufacture.

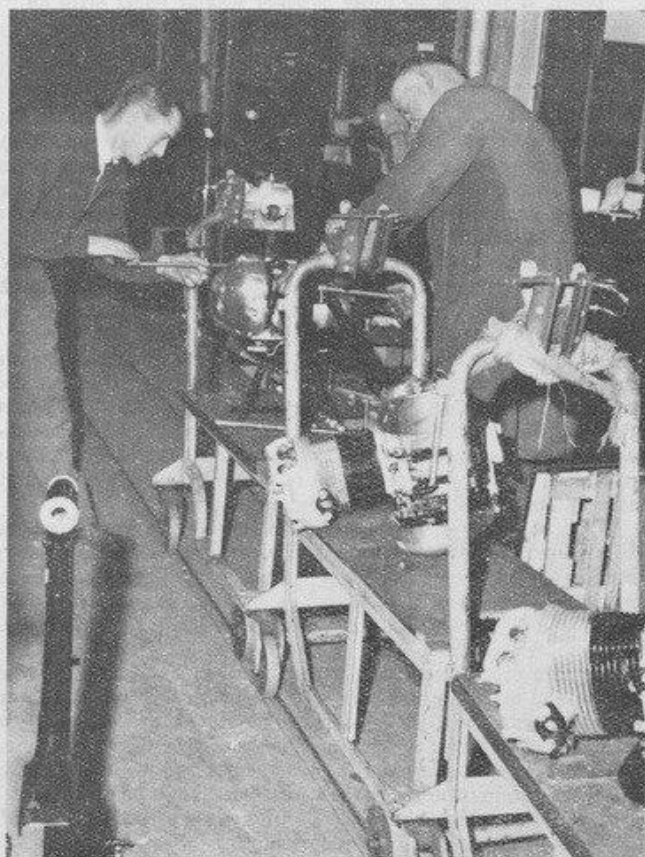
During lunch in the canteen, I saw the Christmas tree, brought in originally to decorate and give the place that Christmas atmosphere, now weighed down with children's toys; small gifts placed there by workers and destined for the nearby children's orphanage—enough for one present for every one of the 600 parentless kids.

Lunch over, the tour started in the lathe department, where some 150 machines are neatly and efficiently installed to carry out the many turning operations on the engine castings. Some 230 drilling machines made quite an impressive sight with operators busy on an array of chaincase castings when I looked in.

I saw the special machines installed to machine gearbox shells, the line-production machining of the cylinder heads, the machining of gearbox selector arms, brake drums, handlebar lugs. All are made in their entirety on the premises; a feature of the A.M.C. set-up that makes its own gearboxes, engines, frames and forks. Only a few specialized items—tyres, carburettors, plugs and electrics—do not see the light of day at Plumstead Road.

Everywhere I was impressed by the cleanliness, brightness and the cheerfulness of the workers, who quickly verified the words of "Jock" West, when they spoke of their own motor cycles and interest. Here, slowly, the secret of the A.M.C. concern was being unfolded.

*Here, engine meets frame, as in the early stages of assembly the engine and gearbox are bolted into the frame. Trolley-type conveyor system is used in this department.*







*Development engineer Jack Williams and his assistant, Fred Wynn tests a new engine in the small underground engine testing room. The resistant load against which the engine is pitted, is supplied by water pressure against vanes fitted on the driving side of the engine crankshaft*

Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent on the installation of modern machinery; space saving is remarkable, yet the compactness lends itself to ease of handling, a point worth noting. I saw, too, the new huge British Clearing 300 ton hydraulic, electrically-operated press, still in the process of installation. To get the thirty-five foot high machine into position amidst the already tightly packed machine room called for ingenuity. It was lowered through the roof! When ready, it will be used for deep metal "drawings", such as chaincases and tank tops.

Interesting though the various aspects of motor cycle manufacture are, I was keen to talk to the men behind the tools and it was while admiring the huge press that I met Service Manager, Fred Neal. A competitor in seven between-wars International Six Days Trials, riding a Matchless machine, he is a past president of two motor cycle clubs and still an active member on the organizing side.

Fred was one of the many who joined the firm after the First World War and has worked his way through the factory before spending over ten years on the testing side. Alert, upright, passionately fond of motor cycling, Fred belied his over-60 years as he walked briskly about his business at the end of our chat.

From a former tester to Tom Allen, one of the men who still spend eight hours a day, five days a week in the saddle in all weathers. Tom has been at the factory since 1932 and was just setting out on a 250 Matchless when we caught him. As a tester, he has to check every functional item on a new machine during the five to ten mile routine "works mileage" run. "Do you like your job, Tom?" was a question I posed.

"I like the job and motor cycling."

"What do you do in your spare time at weekends?" In answering, he too echoed the "Jock" West remarks—"Go motor cycling."

I was by this time becoming infected with the bug myself and was further enthused when I met Devonian, C. J. "Jack" Williams, pipe smoking, ex-road racer, now development engineer in the racing department.

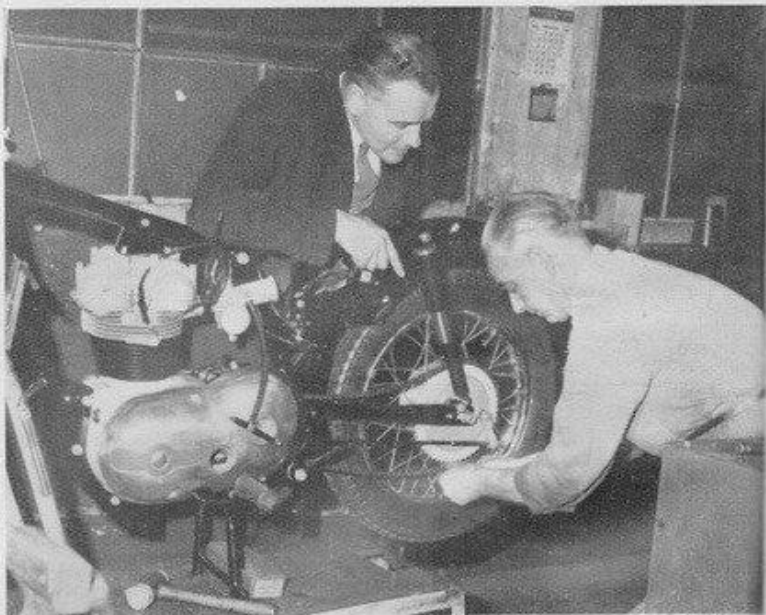
A man with a fine background, learning his trade under a succession of such star "tuners" as "Doc" O'Donovan, Cyril Pullin, Harold Wills and Phil Irving, this ex-Brooklands and T.T. rider is a comparative "new boy" at Woolwich, joining in 1954. Already he has caught the "spirit" of tradition, nothing being too much trouble. He even unbolted a screen so that a picture could be taken of the underground test bed.

Working on a 250 unit was Fred Wynn who has been 18 years with the company, during which time he has been through most phases of production. It was down in this very small room that the new 250 was developed in little over six months—though some engines take a year and more to perfect for sale to the public. Fred, another of the enthusiastic band of workers, politely offered ear muffs before starting the engine for our benefit. These I declined—I later wished I hadn't!

"You must meet the 'governor'," said Mike, after we had bidden farewell to Jack and Fred. So scooting through the despatch department, where crated machines were being designated for India, America and all points west, we jumped in the goods lift to the top floor of the "old" building. We walked through the stores and into the exhaust pipe bending section, where in the far corner, a tweed suited, healthy complexioned, dark haired man was the object of our visit. "Meet Bert Colver," said Mike.

Now I had heard from "Jock" West about this volatile 75-year old, who is not afraid to speak his mind and is no respecter of persons. I was fully prepared to be either snubbed, offended—or accepted. With a twinkle in his eye, this father of trials and grass track rider and repair department chief, Jack Colver, said "Who are you?" I told him and after a few jocular remarks, during which he gave as good as he received, Bert told me his story—or part of it. The full story would make a separate feature.

*Two men who know that team work produces a good machine. Former trials rider Hugh Viney, now production manager of A.M.C. watches Albert Bull connect a rear chain link—a vital link in the conveyor belt system of hand assembly*



Bert joined the firm of H. H. Collier in 1895—17 years after it was founded, and in company with Charlie and Harry Collier, raced the firm's cycles all over the country with much success. He revealed to me that it was on the return cycle trip from Warrington, where they had been racing, that the motorized section of the Matchless concern was born.

"It was raining good and hard, we'd had a hectic weekend and were all tired. Harry Collier was dead beat. 'I've had enough of this pedalling, it's time we fitted engines and saved our energy,' he said to brother Charlie and me. He persuaded his father to pursue this project, and after fitting an engine over the front wheel in 1899, adopted the engine slung under the front down tube in 1900. De Dion engines were first used."

Bert, who acted as mechanic for Charlie, when he won the first I.O.M. T.T. in 1907, himself competed in all the subsequent races until the outbreak of World War I. His exploits in the pioneer days of motor cycling are unique. He was a contemporary of all the great names in the industry.

He still commands great respect from all at Plumstead. It is to him that they all go when they need a prototype tube or pipe bending operation performed, for he is an acknowledged expert in this art.

Reluctantly I had to tear myself away from this very interesting personality, who still acts as mechanic to his son Jack in competitions and who has a grandson, Peter, now taking a very lively part in motor cycle sport. I would like to have stayed, but it was I who had to stop him talking!

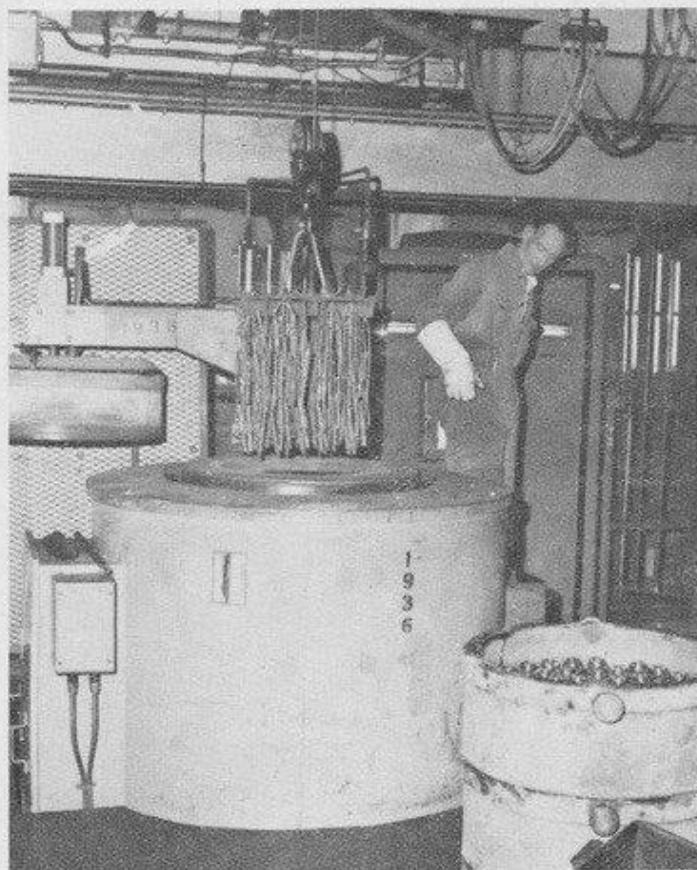
"Let's bring you up-to-date now," said Mike, and whisked me over to meet Production Manager, Hugh Viney, who combines this task with that of Competitions Manager. Hugh, well known to all the motor cycle sporting fraternity as a great all round rider, introduced me to Albert Bull, who has been with the firm 41 years. Albert, one of the team who assemble a complete machine every 12 min. of a working day, told me how he had come home from World War I to join Matchless, and how he had loved every minute of his long associationship. He paused in between assembling the rear suspension unit to tell of the many various models on which he had worked from the famous old Model H twin to the present day G 45. Another link in the long chain stretching back to the early beginnings—and one who is proud to serve still.

As if to substantiate this family spirit down the ages, I got entangled with a party of young apprentices, all spruced up, eagerly showing their proud parents what they do during the day. This "open house" tour helps to bring that sense of being a part—an important part—of a vast organization.

A red glow through the forest of machinery downstairs attracted my attention and I rushed over just in time to see a white hot batch of rocker arms being lifted out of the gas carboning 930 deg. heat treatment furnace, one of four presided over by Harry Allcock, for 40 years a Plumstead man. His assistant foreman, Jack Godley, has shared this task for 20 years—and together they form another long service team doing an important job, with modern equipment under what, to me, seemed ideal conditions. They both spoke with pride of the many aspects of their heat-treatment work and of the changes in technique during their service.

Was there no end to this proof of the happy atmosphere in all branches of production? Chief designer, Phil Walker, has spent 41 of his 58 years at the Plumstead works, apart from a short war-time spell with Handley Page aircraft concern. Responsible for the famous "Silver Arrow" Model X and the "Boy Racer" 7R, his most recent work is the 250 tourer and scrambler.

Back to "Jock" West and a further chat. He opined that sport is so essential to the industry, for not only does success bring further business, but it cultivates that pride of achievement that seems to abound in Plumstead. To this end, internal radio announcements are made following any Matchless or A.J.S. success, and get-togethers are not uncommon, when directors put and keep the workmen in the picture—a point much appreciated.



*Gearbox shafts emerge from the 930° heat treatment furnace and are carried on this overhead conveyor away to the next operation. A case of gears wait their turn. This all-electric department is another aspect of the many various operations carried out in this "make everything ourselves" factory*



*With the spokes and brakedrums in position the wheels pass on to this machine where the operator tests them for "true"*



The policy of finding employment for the factory's riders when they retire from active competition, helps to foster the factory-rider-public tradition, and already Bob Manns is being "schooling" as a sales representative, following in the footsteps of Hugh Viney and "Jock" West himself.

I found that, despite the parent company name of Associated Motor Cycles, there is a distinct line between Matchless and A.J.S. at Plumstead, and indeed there is quite a rivalry among riders and sales personnel.

Personal contact, a tradition started by the Collier brothers, is still maintained by the factory, and "Jock" West recently made a very successful goodwill tour of America which is now bringing results—a great proportion of the vast amount of mail on his desk bore American addresses.

Again, "Jock" and Mike Marriott recently did a "Cook's Tour" of the Continent to prove the new 250, covering 3,000 miles in a fortnight.

Active participation in all forms of competition have brought, be it trials, scrambles, T.T. or Manx Grand Prix, the success deserved, while the many contented owners of Plumstead born machinery have proved their enthusiasm by the recent formation of the A.M.C. Owners Club.

It was dark when I bade my goodbyes and made my way through the office corridors to my car outside. I was almost ashamed, feeling that I should at least be riding ONE of the Plumstead factory's machines. I, too, had come under the

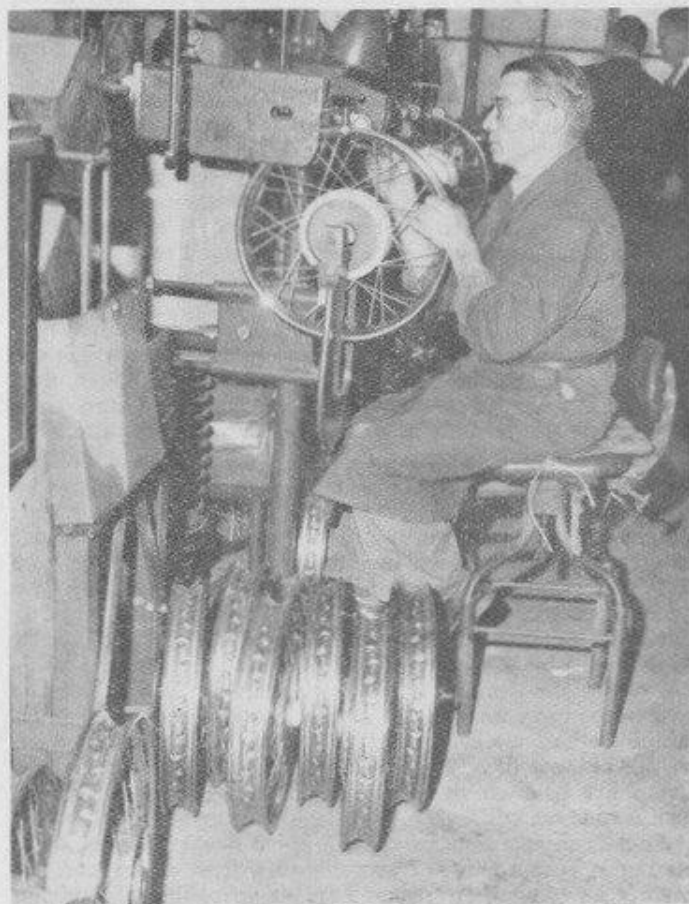
spell. (I *did* ride a Matchless in the 1957 "Press Trial"—and an "Ajay" in 1958!)

I felt I'd found what I was searching; the reason, why for example, so many Australian and New Zealand racing boys make the factory their headquarters during their stay in England. It's as "Jock" said—"We have that mystic family spirit that makes Plumstead a 'home from home'."

A large concern retaining that vintage quality of pride of workmanship and payment to detail of a smaller concern. Yes, the Woolwich factory of A.M.C. has all that.



*Tailend product—crates of engine spares being checked before dispatch to Los Angeles, Stockholm, Karachi and Bombay*



*Final operation in the wheel assembly is the skimming of the brake drums which is being carried out here*