

## Banbury Run 2007

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Since 1949, every year, usually on Father's Day, the Banbury Run is held. It's organised by the Vintage Motor Cycle Club for motorcycles and 3-wheelers manufactured before 1931 and attracts a full entry of 500 participants.

When Trevor Hulks, my co-driver on the London to Sydney Marathon 2004 and Carrera Sudamericana 2006, invited me to navigate for him in the side-car fitted to his newly restored 1928 Rudge, I must admit I didn't at first jump with enthusiasm. I'm more accustomed to having a steering wheel in front of me and to be the one who controls the vehicle. A short test run up the road cocooned close to the road, the clunking chain and the sound of the throbbing 500 c.c. single cylinder engine in my ear failed to convince me that this was the motoring experience that I had been longing for. Every small bump felt like the combination was traversing a massive pothole and I arrived home wondering what I had let myself in for. But life's too short and I've decided in my mature years that you have to embrace every new opportunity with open arms.

When we arrived at the venue it was a hive of activity with a delectable array of vintage machines being prepared for the start of the run by their mainly vintage owners, the earliest, a 1897 Leon Bollee Tandem 640c.c. To cater for the diversity of the machinery three separate routes are organised. Our route of 60 miles was to proceed through north Oxfordshire and south Warwickshire returning via Sunrising Hill, a steep twisting climb up the Warwickshire escarpment, which the Midlands motorcycle factory's riders originally used to test new models from the early 1900's.

From 10 a.m. the flag was dropped at one minute intervals to start groups of four motorcycles. At 11.45 it was time for us to start and I felt some trepidation that my navigational skills might not be up to scratch and we would get lost.

At first a number of participants were bunched up as we wound our way through the streets of outer Banbury but once in the countryside there was much overtaking. With an average speed of just 24 m.p.h. allowed, the 500 c.c. Rudge was not happy at such a slow speed and when we arrived at the first secret time control I wondered if we were late or early. Only one mileage check was given in the instructions at about the half-way mark so I felt confident when we were only 2 minutes early. I started to become accustomed to the bumpy ride, especially on the narrow minor roads when my driver had to move the side-car off the tarmac to the pot-holed verge to allow others to overtake while I bumped up and down at least six inches from the seat. Arriving at Sunrising Hill Trevor skilfully changed down into a lower gear and the Rudge easily ascended the hill to applause from the crowds. A few miles later we arrived at the finish all intact.

When the results were announced we were excluded &ndash; our arrival was 12 minutes early &ndash; participants can be up to 30 minutes late but no more than 3 minutes early. The driver felt rather disappointed as it was difficult keeping the speed down on the Rudge but when one of the Stewards mentioned that to slow down you merely stop for a pint at a pub along the way.

It's strange, neither of us thought of that. Perhaps next year.