

Open wide - Say "R"

That's Dr. Davies' Model R, of course.

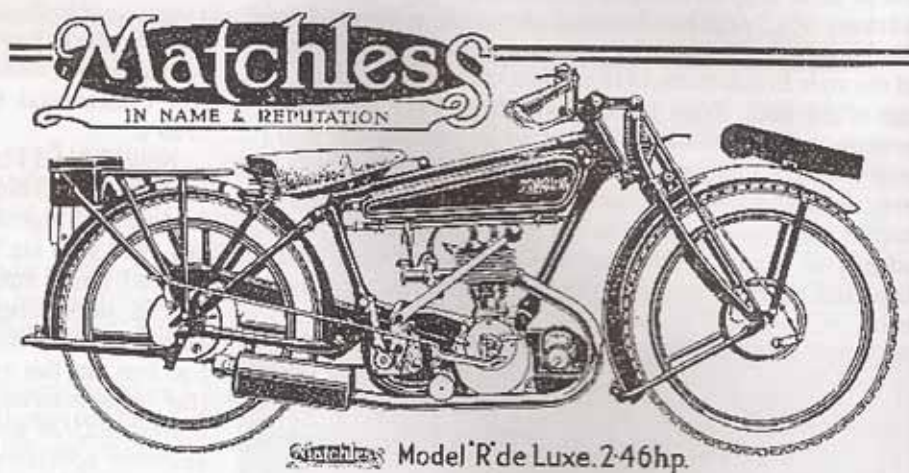
When young medical student W.T. Davies reached his majority - that was when he became 21 years of age, if you've forgotten that quaint old terminology - his father treated him to a brand new motor cycle. Lucky lad, if not uniquely so. But what may be unique is that the soon-to-be Dr. Davies kept ahold of his cherished birthday present until early in 1996 and no less than sixty nine years separate the two dates!

The bike wasn't exotic, in fact it was quite humble, being but a 250cc side valver from the Collier Brothers' Matchless factory down in Plumstead, South East London; a 1927 Model R. However, it was bought to do a serious job providing daily transport at reasonable cost and after being purchased in the Davies' home town of Oxford (from King's of Oxford it is believed) it was sent by train down to Somerset where W.T. was undergoing his training. There the Model R received its registration mark of YB 8717 and began a demanding but cosseted life for a number of years.

Come the outbreak of war in 1939 and Surgeon Dr. Davies was seconded to duty in Salisbury, the Model R being brought into use again and prized for its undoubted economy of operation, up until 1942 when it was laid up for the duration. In fact, the *duration* turned out to be for a term of 54 years, because it never came out again, as the last Road Fund Tax disc in the licence holder proves today. But, it was well laid up, it

was kept dry stored under favourable conditions, such that when vintage enthusiast Les Leach first spotted it some nine years back tucked away in Dr. Davies' garage he immediately asked to buy it. It wasn't for sale, said the first and only owner, who frustrated Les even more, by pointing to the original toolkit still wrapped in its leather roll inside the toolbox.

Les didn't give up though and as Dr. Davies was in touch with him annually to MOT Test his equally well kept MkII Jaguar saloon, there was always the opportunity of dropping a mention here and there until, this year, the old gentleman changed his mind and let the Model R go. It is has gone into good hands and, following the very minimum of essential overhaul - new tyres and



tubes to replace perished rubber and a magneto armature rewind - it is now out on the roads again, still bearing all the fittings and period accessories with which it was originally supplied. It even has the original chains and spark plug still in place and performing well. Only missing bits were the rear lamp and (strangely) one front mudguard stay, stolen while it was in store during the later war years.

The WWII headlamp mask is still in place on the tiny vintage Lucas lamp which, incidentally, is supplied from a battery only. This R doesn't have a dynamo fitted, it never had, Dr. Davies finding that a charged battery supplied just enough amperage to see him through whatever night time riding he had to undertake. What if the lights did

Les Leach with his one-previous-owner-from-new Matchless Model R.

begin to dim? well, he had that one thought out, by adding a switch into the wiring to the rear lamp which he promptly cut out of the circuit to reduce the drain. The switch is there under the saddle now.

The machine has never been apart, nor has the engine been stripped, in fact the only fault Dr. Davies could recall was trouble with the oil pump during his first two weeks of ownership; that was quickly replaced by Matchless under guarantee. The speedo records a mileage of 8,364, said to be perhaps a little less than exact, because the owner always believed the gearing of the speedometer drive was inaccurate and suggested, maybe, Les should work on the assumption that it might actually be closer to a thousand miles or so more than the figure shown! The good Doctor even remembered the last day he rode the Model R, it was 16th June 1942 he said, adding that, nobody else had ever thrown a leg over the saddle. Until this year, that is.

Watch out for this little gem around VMCC events in the South Midlands, it's a beauty and is unlikely to receive the full cosmetic treatment until such time as the mechanicals shout for major attention; if ever. □

Les's Model R is in fact the de luxe version for 1927, which had wired edge 2.75"x19" tyres, drum brake to front wheel, magneto shield and Lycett Aero saddle over and above the standard specification.

The wartime headlamp mask is still in place and the old Licence disc expired 31st Dec 1942!

