



## AYR ROADS CYCLING CLUB

The story of Ayr Roads Cycling Club is the story of the many people who have been associated with the club during its seventy five years. During this time hundreds of Ayrshire people have enjoyed cycling with the club and each will have their own memories of cycling days. Whether on a club run, a touring holiday or in competition, they all contributed to the success of Ayr Roads Cycling Club. Some gained cycling fame a club level, others at district or national level. Some represented Scotland in international competition and in recent years achieved fame by winning world championship medals. Many distinguished themselves by outstanding touring feats, a feature of the sport in which Ayr Roads C.C. gained reputation. Some have claims to fame in other spheres, education, teaching, business and commerce.



David Bell

One name in particular stands out in the story of the club, that of David Ernest Tomlinson Bell, a Dumfriesshire born man and co-founder of Ayr Roads C.C. He was the first club secretary. He probably more than any other member, sowed the seeds of interest in cycling in people's minds through his writings of his travel on a bicycle. He introduced many youngsters to cycling. From 1931 until his untimely death in 1965, he described countless scenes and wrote under the name of "The Highwayman" of thousands of incidents, which make up a cyclist's in his weekly column in the Ayrshire Post.

The official story began on January 31 1930, when The Ayrshire Post carried a letter headed; "Ayr Road Club". It was addressed to the Post editor requesting insertion in that weeks issue. The letter informed readers "A cycling club is at last being formed in Ayr. It is to be known as the Ayr Road Club". *In 1935 the club's name was changed to be the Ayr Roads Cycling Club.* The purpose of the club was the amalgamation of local unattached riders." Surely there are many good cyclists in Ayr " the letter started "who would join if they but knew."

Ayr Roads was not the town's first cycling club. Well before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ayrshire had many cycling clubs. The list included Ayr Cycling Club, Alloway C.C., Clubs also existed in Coylton, Cumnock, Girvan, Irvine, Kilbirnie, Kilmarnock, Maybole and Muirkirk.

### The Early Years – 1930's

Andrew Robertson, a founder member recalled an encounter on Bennane Hill on the Girvan to Ballantrae coast road with two riders on a tandem. The pair was Tom McKean and Davie Bell. The encounter ultimately leads to the forming of the club. Andrew's recollection was that the first official run would be to Largs by Kilwinning, Dalry and Lochwinnoch. Three members took part –

Tom McKean, Davie Bell and John Stewart. It left from John Griers' cycle shop, Peebles Street, Newton on Ayr.

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1930 the club held its first annual general meeting in Grier's cycle shop, 22 members were present. Throughout the 1930's club runs were regularly in excess of 100 miles in distance and the club's reputation for mile-eating members was born. On New Year's day in 1932 two riders clocked up runs of 100 miles each on separate runs. The highest recorded annual total was that of John Kissell with 14,600 miles cycled in 1932.



Ayr Road Cycling Club 1931

As well as touring some members rose to the challenge of competition. Massie Alexander was the outstanding rider of 1935 having won the club championship for the third successive year. He held 5 of the clubs seven records – 10 miles in 25 minutes, 45 seconds. 25 miles in 1 hour 8min 8sec, 30 miles in 1:26:45, 50 miles in 2:25:05 and 100 miles in 5:04:04. The other two records, the 12 hour and Turnberry circuit stood to David Bell. Massie was the ideal all-rounder on two wheels, competing in events at all distances, performing lengthy tours and showing him as a dedicated hosteller.

In 1934 the club acquired a cottage at Ladside, Pinwherry, 30 miles from Ayr, which was available for members every weekend. Later a hut was built nearby for a base to use for day and weekend trips. To this day the club still has a hut or rather its country headquarters in the Pinwherry area.

### **The War Years - 1940's**

The Second World War disrupted the club's activities despite the member's resolve to carry on. The club hut visits for 1941 totalled 157 day visits and 47 weekend stays. Davie Bell was making regular trips to the country headquarters but also started to visit Kendoon Youth Hostel in that year. He became very knowledgeable about the Kendoon area he wrote extensively about the area in his weekly column in the Ayrshire Post. Three names began to appear in Davie's weekly articles. These were Henry Carse, Jim Fairbairn and his younger brother Harry. During the war years the clubs touring interests were kept alive by Davie who rode along with Jim and Harry to

the hostels at Kendoon and Southwoodend, and also looked in at the club hut on the bank of the river Stincher.

Club membership dropped to 14 in 1943, six fewer than the previous year.

The club found a new competitor in 1944. His name was Harry Fairbairn. In April of that year he was the fastest novice rider in the 10 mile time trial. It was his first ever race and led to a racing career that was to see him eventually become club champion, Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire Champion and Scottish Champion. He was the clubs first rider to represent his country. Cycling also started him on a very successful business career.



Harry Fairbairn

By 1949 Harry Fairbairn and George Adair were the real success stories of the club. Records at 30 and 50 miles were broken by the young George with times of 1:7:01 and 2:11:56. He won both the clubs junior and senior championships that year. Meanwhile Harry Fairbairn set records at 100 miles and 12 hour. Racing 100 miles in 4 hours, 38 min, 13 sec and also covering 233miles 867 yards over 12 hours. He won the first of his two Scottish Hill climb championships that year.

### **The Post War 1950's.**

The post war resurgence of cycling saw a number of club riders achieving success in competitions. In 1951 the club won three national titles with Harry Fairbairn winning the Scottish Mass Start Road Race on the Isle of Cumbrae and the Scottish Hill Climb Championship at Lyle Hill Greenock. Ayr Roads also took the team award with support provided to Harry from Bill Potts and Jim Stirling.

In 1953 young Michael Mason, a 16 year old from Ayr, took Ayrshire Cycling by storm by lowering the 25 mile record to 1 hour 2 min and 1 sec and by the following year won both the club junior and senior championship.

Ladies were also doing well in competition and in 1953 Davina Loch set a record time of 27:42 for 10 miles only to be beaten in the very last race of the year by Margaret Steel with a time of 27:41. Margaret also set a ladies 25 mile record of 1:12:28.

Meanwhile on the touring section Davie Bell visited the club hut a remarkable 230 times during 1957. One club wit wrote in the record book that he and his touring partner Peter Blane were only conspicuous by their absence from the hut when a working party was in progress. The hut became a regular destination out with the racing season, when the young riders would cycle down on a Saturday, before riding down the Byne Hill to frequent the dancing at the Grand Hall in

Girvan or the pictures. Bikes were left at the Police station or discreetly elsewhere and safety collected before the return journey, which was always a jovial occasion.

The club continued with their success in the 1950's when the McLean brothers from Coylton joined. Alex and Bobby McLean teamed up with Alex Forsyth to win the Ayrshire & Dumfriesshire cycling Association (A&DCA) team shield. Mick Mason lowered the club 100 mile record to 4:20:30 (a record that stood until 1990) the 50 mile record to 2:04:27 and increased the 12 hour record to 244 miles. Mick also set the Ayr to Dumfries to Ayr record of 6 hours 4 minutes.

In 1959 Mick and the two McLean brothers were chosen to represent the A&DCA in the three-day 395 mile Tour of Scotland road race. The Ayr Roads trio finished 8<sup>th</sup> overall, ahead of the Scottish and Australian national teams. Mick finished the highest placed Scot and was recommended for the 1960 Scottish team.

### **The 1960's**

Alec McLean won the club championship in 1960 and was the first recipient of the Carrick Challenge Cup. A magnificent trophy donated to the club the previous year by Mrs W Tweedly of Maybole. Alec's was the outright winner of the championship with an average speed of 23.904mph over 25, 50 and 100 miles. Alec broke club records at 10, 25 and 50 miles that year and became the first club rider to beat 1 hour for 25 miles with a time of 58 min 58 sec. Younger brother Bobby was to receive the championship trophy the following year. In the ladies club championship Margaret Fairbairn (formally Steel) returned to the winner rostrum, collecting her seventh club title. She had an average speed of 20.718 mph over 10 and 25 miles and also won the A&DCA championship.

The touring aspect of the club's activities was also kept before the reading public by Davie Bell whose weekly column in 1961 found its way into a modest limited edition book in paperback by some of Davie's friends. Stewart King and Harry Bonsor, both employees of the Ayrshire Post and club members compiled the book. Looking through the book the reader discovers that The Highwayman's annual mileage fell by 2,500 miles due to him "denting" a bike early in the year and through illness.



Robert Harvey & Bobby McLean

In 1962 the club produced its second individual Scottish championship when Robert Harvey, aged 18 years won the Scottish Junior championship in Dundee. Over the two laps of the 33 mile circuit Robert assisted by the clubs Kenny Paterson tore the 40 man field apart, reducing their numbers to 15 by the start of the second lap. Robert won the sprint finish from a final bunch of 12 riders. He was the fourth Ayrshire rider to bring a national title to the county that year.

The mid-sixties was a dark period for the club with the death of two members. In September 1964 co-founder Tom McKean died. The clubs vice chairman Harry Roberts also died in a road accident when on holiday with his family in Wiltshire. Then in April 65 its other co-founder Davie Bell passed away, aged 58. The passing of the two co-founders, who had seen the club and its members grow in size and purpose was a blow which might best be understood by the flow of tributes paid to their memory in print and on radio by their many friends.

Through Davie's death ended the weekly publicising of the club's touring activities through his Highwayman's column in the Ayrshire Post. In 1966 a permanent memorial to Davie Bell was

unveiled at Rowantree Toll, the junction of the Straiton to Newton Stewart Road and the notorious Nick o' the Balloch road. The club also promoted the first Davie Bell memorial road race, run over the "Nick" and passed Davie's memorial. Scott Savage of the Glenmarnock Wheelers won the first race. He had a narrow win over the club's Alec McLean, who received the David Bell Memorial trophy as the first Ayr Roads rider in the race. The David Bell road race still runs annually and is one of the classic road races on the Scottish racing calendar.

### **The 1970's**

Although club membership numbers fell in the early 1970's there was still a strong band of hard racing cyclists who continued to bring success to the club. John Phillips, John Lyndsay, Rab Ferguson and Robert Harvey all achieved numerous honours during the early seventies, but the one young club rider of the 1970's that achieved the most success was John Curran. In 1970 the 15 year old Curran was club junior champion, club road race champion, Association schoolboy champion at 10 and 25 miles. The following year he teamed up with John Lyndsay and Robert Harvey to set a new team record for 25 miles. They clocked 58:45, 1:0:12 and 1:1:03 respectively to give an aggregate time of 3 hour exactly. By 1972 John Curran was the clubs junior Best All Rounder champion with the highest ever club average of 25.568mph. His times were 22:30 for 10 miles, 58:45 for 25 miles and 2:2:25 for 50 miles. The following year he became the only club rider, to date to win the Davie Bell Memorial Road race. John went on to have continued success riding for the club and Scotland, ending his career in South Africa beating Sean Kelly (4<sup>th</sup> in 1985 Tour De France) among other riders in the Tour of the Winelands stage race.

By the mid – late 70's it was the club's Alan Bonsor who received international recognition when selected for the Scotland team to ride the Milk Race and the Tour of Czechoslovakia. By the late 70's the club was refreshed by an influx of young riders that raised its profile in the Scottish schoolboy and junior racing scene. Whilst Nick Dryburgh, Simon Elphick, Alistair Ferns, Derek Machan, Steven McDonald, Kenny Wilson, Jamie Whyte and Blair Wyllie all achieved individual success it was Peter Blane who in 1978 won the Scottish Junior Road Race Championship in Aberdeen.

Away from racing the young club riders maintained the clubs reputation for clocking up miles when on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1979, 16 riders competed in a sponsored cycle run from Ayr to Carlisle and back in the one day to raise money for Cancer Research. Leaving Ayr at 5:00am stopping at New Cumnock and Dumfries, Longtown and Carlisle, before heading back to Ayr which they reached at 8:00pm after 220 miles in 15 hours. The riders followed the route taken by Davie Bell when he and other Ayr cyclists made the epic trip in 1934.



## The 1980's

1980 was the club's Golden Jubilee year and a celebration of the past and present riders inspired a number of veteran riders to return to racing. The following decade saw Arnold Thomson, Bobby McLean and Kenny Finlayson all return to racing. The mixture of youth and experience proved a successful blend when in 1981 Peter Blane, Alistair Ferns and Arnold Thomson set a new team record for 100 miles of 13:hrs, 27min, 10 sec. The same year young Peter broke the club 10 mile record with a magnificent time of just 21:58, the first club rider to record under 22 minutes. Peter's racing career saw him ride in national colours in the 1982 6 day Scottish Health Race and the Isle of Man. Meanwhile Kenny Finlayson, Kenny Wilson and Steven McDonald pursued the time trial discipline both in Scotland and south of the border. Kenny Finlayson setting a time of 2:0:39 over 50 miles.

During this time the club was also very busy promoting events and a popular 25 mile course in Ayrshire often saw fields of 120 riders, even for evening events.

Away from racing long and often hard miles were covered by those touring. Arnold and Alan Thomson were regular visitors to the Lake District. Likewise clocking up hard winter miles was seen as good training for the forthcoming racing season. November 1981 saw Peter Blane, Jamie Whyte and Blair Wyllie on a 4-day tour covering Ayr- Loch Lomond – Glencoe – Stirling – Glasgow and Ayr. Strong westerly gales accompanied by driving rain only interrupted by hail made for difficult cycling. Short winter days and poor weather made sure the boys saw nothing other than the wheel in front of them.

By 1988 the club hut at Pinwherry was in need of replacement and a new site was found nearby at Poundland and new hut erected. Another milestone that year was the sponsorship of the club by Harry Fairbairn who had developed his cycle shop business into a very successful BMW car dealership. From 1989 the Club would be known as Ayr Roads Cycling Club – Harry Fairbairn BMW.



## The 1990's



Brave talking at the 1989 AGM led to one of the club's most remarkable events the following year. In its 60<sup>th</sup> year four riders cycled 880 miles from Lands End to John O'Groats in only 6 days. Bobby McLean, Arnold Thomson, Alan Bonsor and Malcolm Inch averaged 147 miles each day as they travelled through 19 counties to cover the journey. The four-man team tore through the English countryside stopping overnight at Street in Somerset, Ironbridge, and Kendal before crossing the border on the A74. After further overnight stops at Loch Lomond and Loch Ness youth hostels before they reached John O'Groats in a total time of 48 hours 24 minutes and 1 second. Their efforts raised over £4,000 for charity.

By 1993 fresh faces in the club began to achieve racing recognition. Young Neil Campbell broke the club's schoolboy record with a time of 1:00:30 and he teamed up with John Guthrie and Steven Armour to break the team 50 mile record with an aggregated time of 6:8:10. John Guthrie broke the 100 mile record in 4 hours 17 min 24 sec and the Ayr – Dumfries – Ayr record in 5:29:17.

Sadly in 1996 the club lost its President, long time supporter and sponsor Harry Fairbairn who died whilst cycling in Majorca.

Vic Possee joined the club in the 1990's and soon established himself as a dedicated club man and keen track rider. He visited the national velodrome in Manchester and first competed in the World Masters Track Championships in 1998.

For spells during the 1990's the Scottish Borders became a popular area for short weekend tours. The first tour in 1996 saw Arnold Thomson, Tam Lynch, Malcolm Inch and Blair Wyllie leave Ayr to head for overnight stops at Moffat, Kirk Yetholm and Locherbie. Tales of great runs alongside St Mary's Loch, The Ettrick valley and landladies in Kirk Yetholm were enough to entice fellow club members to tour the borders during the following years.

## The New Millennium

The first miles of the new millennium were cycled on Sunday 2 January 2000 when the club held its annual "first foot" at the club hut. The club run arrived after 2 hours cycling from Ayr to very hospitable welcome at its country headquarters from Vic Possee who had stayed overnight. The millennium started well with Craig Gilmour breaking Peter Blane's 19 year old 10 mile record by 7 seconds, recording a time of 21:51. The ladies 100 mile record was also broken in 2000 by Louise Blaney with a time of 5:13:05. Despite the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 a mixed bag of results were recorded. Craig Gilmour brought the Ayrshire Road Race Championship back to the club and Vic Possee won two silver medals at the British track championship in the 2000m pursuit and the 15km points race.

The expanding popularity of "sportive" events abroad attracted several club riders to travel to France and compete in the Etape du Tour between 2001 and 2005 Alex McAllister, Paul Muir,

Jamie Kennan, Ian Robertson and Kenny Wilson all tackled the routes which covered a lengthy Alpine stages of the Tour de France.

Meanwhile back in Scotland. Blair Wyllie and Arnold Thomson completed two tours of north west Scotland during 2001 and 2002. In 2001 the pair covered 357 miles in five days and it only rained once after 354 miles ! Their route took them over the Bealch Na Ba climb to Applecross and onto Torridon and Ullapool.

2003 saw another End to End challenge by Blair Wyllie and Alistair Ferns. Leaving very south tip of Britain the pair took 13 days to cover 994 miles before reaching John O'Groats. They raise over £7,000 for charity.

Following his success at the British championships Vic Possee was invited to the 2004 South Pacific Masters Games held in Hamilton, New Zealand and came home with a bronze medal. Later that year he became the first cub rider to win a Union Cycliste International (UCI) medal. He came 3<sup>rd</sup> in the age related 2km pursuit event at the World Master Track Championship at Manchester, clocking 2min 44.189 seconds. Vic added 2 National bronze medals to his UCI medal that year.

The above is a short extract of the clubs first 75 years. As it continues to cycle into the new millennium no doubt more great touring and racing champions will continue to wear the colours of Ayr Roads Cycling Club.

*To be continued.....*

