

John Hartle

JOHN HARTLE was a great sportsman who would never give up. He loved racing as much as he loved life. His tragic death, while racing at Scarborough, has robbed motor cycle sport of a brilliant rider and a fine ambassador.

At 34, he was one of the most experienced riders in road racing. He could look back on a successful racing career which began in 1953. But John preferred to look forward. Despite the mishaps of his worst year, which included two TT crashes, he was already planning another season on the Continent.

Now, the famous white helmet with the coat of arms of his native Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, will not be seen again. It belonged, as did his polished riding style, to an unforgettable racing era, of which he was the last active survivor.

A former Norton, MV-Agusta, and Gilera works rider, he was an outstanding example of a great rider who never won a world title. He came close to it but never more brilliantly than in 1967 when, after a short retirement through injuries, he rode a Matchless into second place in the 500cc world championship.

His life was dedicated to motor cycles. He learned to ride when still at school and competed in trials at 17. In his first racing season, at 19, he won the Newcomer's Award in the 1963 Manx Grand Prix.

In 1954, the year he made his big-time debut, at Scarborough, he led the Senior Manx GP by five seconds before running out of petrol. In 1955, he joined the Norton works team, with John Surtees and Jack Brett. He won his first classic, the 1956 Ulster GP after finishing second to Surtees (MV) in the Senior TT.

At the end of 1957, he quit the army, and the Norton team, to join Surtees on MVs. It was a memorable partnership in which Hartle always played second fiddle.

In the 1958 Senior TT, Hartle became the second man to lap the Isle of Man at over 100 mph. When Hartle's MV caught fire, winner Surtees became the third to lap at over the magic 'ton.' The first was Bob

A tribute to a great man

by Peter Howdle

McIntyre (Gilera), winner of the 1957 Senior.

The only rider ever to race a 500 MV-six, at the 1958 Italian GP where it broke down. Hartle spent two rather unhappy years with MV. Due to breakdowns, crashes and injuries, relations became strained.

He quit in 1960, buying his own Nortons. But he was back on MVs for the TT, where he won the Junior and was second in the Senior. He did not win another TT until 1967, when he won the first Production TT, on a 650 Triumph.

The years between brought mixed fortunes. For although he won the 1960 Ulster GP, on a Comerfords Norton, a crash at Scarborough in 1961, kept him out of racing until 1963, when he made a sensational return on works Gileras. In the Senior TT, Hartle was second to Mike Hailwood (MV) after lapping at 105.56 mph.

After a crash at Imola, in 1964, where he fractured his skull, he was advised to retire. Personal problems were surmounted when he started an accessory business. As he recovered, his will to race again grew stronger. In 1966, with medical approval, Hartle was back.

A win at Oulton in 1967, was the start of one of the most successful racing comebacks the sport has ever seen. After his TT victory, he won the Mellano Trophy at the Hutchinson 100. Success followed success.

A broken arm at Mallory at the end of last season was a blow he refused to accept as a hint to quit. He would not give up. He worked hard to get fit and he succeeded. He proved it by finishing third in the Ulster GP.

Since his second marriage, he lived at Moulton, Northampton, not far from Silverstone, where the lap record he shares with Derek Minter has never been broken.

John was a gifted rider. He was a man with a vocation. He was a firm believer in the future of motor cycle sport. And, for as long as men believe in doing what they want to do, and try to do it well, the spirit of men like John Hartle will live on.