

## Speed Trials at Avonmouth

### 1922 – St. Andrew's Road & 1923 – The "Low Level road" (Portway)

#### 10 June 1922 – St. Andrew's Road, Bristol MC&LCC

Eleven years after its creation, 1922 was a year of change for the Bristol Motor Cycle Club. To cater for the growing number of car owners in and around the city, it was determined that changing the club's name to Bristol Motor-Cycle & Light Car Club would be more inclusive. And, having decided not to continue with the speed trials they had been running on the beach at Weston-super-Mare, they now had to look elsewhere for a suitable speed venue. This they found closer to their Bristol base in the form of St. Andrew's Road at Avonmouth, seven miles west of the city centre, adjacent to the busy docks.

Much of the land around the docks and the village of Avonmouth was owned by the Miles family. In the 1900s Philip Napier Miles had ambitious plans to create a huge new town on the 'Kings Weston Estate' around the docks, but all that was ever completed was a new dock entrance, and St. Andrew's Road, leading northwards from St. Andrew's church. In 1922 Miles gave the Bristol MC&LCC permission to use the road on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June for speed trials for motorcycles and light cars.

In front of a "large crowd", best of the motorcyclists was LE Brierly (3½ hp Douglas), while AJ Sgonina was quickest of the light cars in 50<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.

#### Results

##### Light cars

B.T.D. Light cars: AJ Sgonina (8-7hp GN), 50<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec

##### Light Cars, 3 or 4 wheelers (open):

1 AJ Sgonina (8-7hp GN), 50<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec;  
2 R Passey, 64<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.; 3 Paul Bonnet, 67<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec; 4 SG James, 73<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.

##### Light Cars, 3 or 4 wheelers (general):

1 R Passey, 65<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.; 2 SG James, 67<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec; 3 P Bonnet, 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.

##### Light Cars, 3 or 4 wheelers (trade barred):

1 AJ Sgonina (8-7hp GN), 50<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec; 2 P Bonnet, 67<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> sec.



At the Avonmouth Speed Trials organised by the Bristol M.C. and L.C.C. A. T. Koebler winning the unlimited class on a 494 c.c. Douglas.

#### **14 April 1923 - "Low Level road" (Portway) – ACU Wessex Centre**

The Bristol club returned to Avonmouth for further speed trials the following year, but it was now as part of a new local grouping of clubs, the Wessex Centre of the ACU; nor was it to St. Andrews Road, but to a brand-new road.

Early in 1922 the Bristol club, along with Bath and several other clubs in the vicinity, dissatisfied with actions of the Worcester-based ACU Western Centre, had withdrawn from that group and created their own new Wessex Centre. For their first major event this new group, with the Bristol club at the forefront, arranged to use a newly constructed road at Avonmouth for an 'Open' status speed trial, with an aim of bringing national motor-cycle stars to the West Country. While this would predominately be a 'bike event, three 'Light Car' classes, for Wessex club members only, were also included.

In 1919 Bristol's City Corporation began the construction of a major new highway to link the city centre with the busy docks at Avonmouth. Instead of winding over the downs through Clifton, Sea Mills and Shirehampton to Avonmouth, the new road would be built through the bottom of the Avon gorge alongside the river. Given the name "Portway" when fully opened in 1926, and years later designated 'A4', during its construction it was usually referred to as the new "Low Level Road".

By early 1922 the roadway of the western stretch of this new road between Avonmouth and Shirehampton had been completed, although not open to the public, and it was here that the clubs were allowed to run their new event.

The road itself comprised two 17 to 18 feet wide concrete strips (intended for buses), either side of a 45 feet wide asphalt track. The riverward strip was used for the speed runs, and the other for return trips, allowing competitors to slowly return to the start area directly after their runs.

The start line was at the Avonmouth end (approximately where today the M5 crosses the Portway) with a 50 yard run-up allowing a rolling start to the timed half-mile course. This was practically level, with one slight left-hand bend, and finished near Shirehampton (before reaching the junction with Station Road).

Special electrical timing equipment was loaned by the brake lining manufacturer Ferodo, and it was hoped to use the Bristol club's equipment for timing the last quarter-mile. Timekeeper was AV Ebblewhite, of Brooklands fame, while Bristol's experienced Teddie Kickham was Clerk of Course and Secretary of the Meeting.

Joining the local Douglas factory riders Vic Anstice, Rex Judd, and Eric Spencer, the 62 entrants included other top riders such as Sunbeam's George Dance, Bert Kershaw (New Imperial), Hubert Hassall (Norton), Geoff Davison (Levis), and Cotton works manager Freddie Morgan on the Gloucester built machines.

The fine weather of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June brought out a huge crowd, one estimate being 10,000, to line the course. The event got underway at 1 pm, starting with the sidecar classes, so arranged to allow time for "stripping" machines for the solo runs. Although there were several heavy rain showers late in the afternoon, approximately 250 individual runs were made, with only a couple of short delays, through to 7 pm.

Sunbeam's George Dance won four classes, while Vic Anstice, who won ten, and recorded best times in both the sidecar and solo categories, was awarded the Wessex Centre's silver cups for best aggregate performance and fastest time of the day, his 73.81 mph average on a 746cc Douglas solo being fastest of all.

Although most of the entries were motorcycles, the sidecar classes also included some 3-wheeler Morgans, with George Goodall (later to become a director of the Morgan company) performing well in his 1085cc model. Two of the light car classes were won by Newport-based AJ Sgonina on a 1087cc GN.

While according the Motorcycle's reporter "*the speeds of most riders 'looked fast' "*, and maintained the interest of the spectators, the slower light cars, averaging about 45 mph, understandably were less impressive and "*were received with much hilarity.*"

The meeting was considered to have been a huge success, and the clubs wanted to repeat the event in 1924. However, although the new road was still not open to the public, permission wasn't forthcoming and the following year the Wessex Centre's major 'Open' event was held at Kingsdown hill, near Bath, instead.

### Results

<b>Light cars</b>
B.T.D. Light cars: AJ Sgonina (1087cc GN), 32.38 sec
Class 61, Closed, Wessex Centre members only, Experts barred; Touring light cars upto 1100cc: 1 AR Passey (1087cc GN), 57.78 sec.
Class 62, Closed, Wessex members only, Experts barred; Sports model light cars up to 1100cc: 1 AG Sgonina (1087cc GN), 34.25 sec.
Class 63, Closed, Wessex Centre members only; any model light cars upto 1100cc: 1 AJ Sgonina (1087cc GN), 32.38 sec. (walkover)

### Sources

Bristol Times & Mirror, Western Daily Press, MotorCycle.

SPRINT - Speed Hillclimbs and Speed Trials in Britain: 1899-1925. T. R. Nicholson, David & Charles 1969.

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Westcountry Motorsport History

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