



Bert and Margaret Bentley

Bert Bentley

Enthusiast for All Seasons

By AMCA Staff

There are motorcyclists and then there are enthusiasts. Bert Bentley of the AMCA's Buffalo Chapter would fit the latter. He is one of those rare individuals who truly loves the sport and has spent the better part of his lifetime involved in it.

Born in England, Bert and his parents emigrated to Canada in 1912 where they took up residence in Calgary, Alberta. A short four years later young Bert and his mother traveled back to England to visit relatives, making a somewhat hazardous journey with the Kaiser's U-boats patrolling the North Atlantic during WWI. Upon returning to Canada in 1917, it was down to business in the Calgary school system. As the years progressed, Bert developed a keen interest in all things mechanical but special attention was given to the freedom offered by two-wheeled transportation.

Bert's father Jack was very supportive when one day the teenager asked permission to purchase a motorcycle. Not some little single cylinder machine, but an impressive Indian Powerplus. This Springfield make helped launch a riding career that continues to this day. The Powerplus, a well maintained, used 1918 model, provided good solid transportation for several summers. At that point Bert acquired two single cylinder machines, a 1912 New Hudson and 1918 Harley.

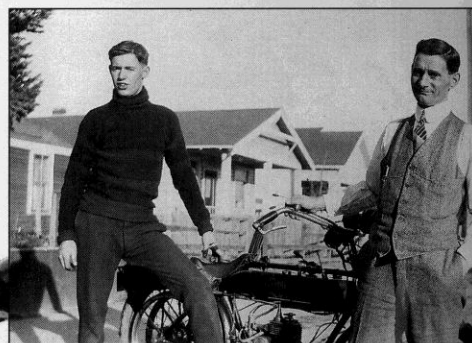
As the old saying goes, "There is no substitute for cubic inches," Bert had the bug for more stamina than these one lungers could supply. He quickly moved up to a 1930 Harley VL model.

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Motorcycles were becoming a big part of his life by this time and it was only natural to use them in his employment. Being a traveling salesman for a wholesale coal company, Bert began making his sales calls on a newly acquired 1932 Harley VLD sidecar outfit. "Oh, the company didn't mind as long as I got my work done and that aluminum bodied sidecar

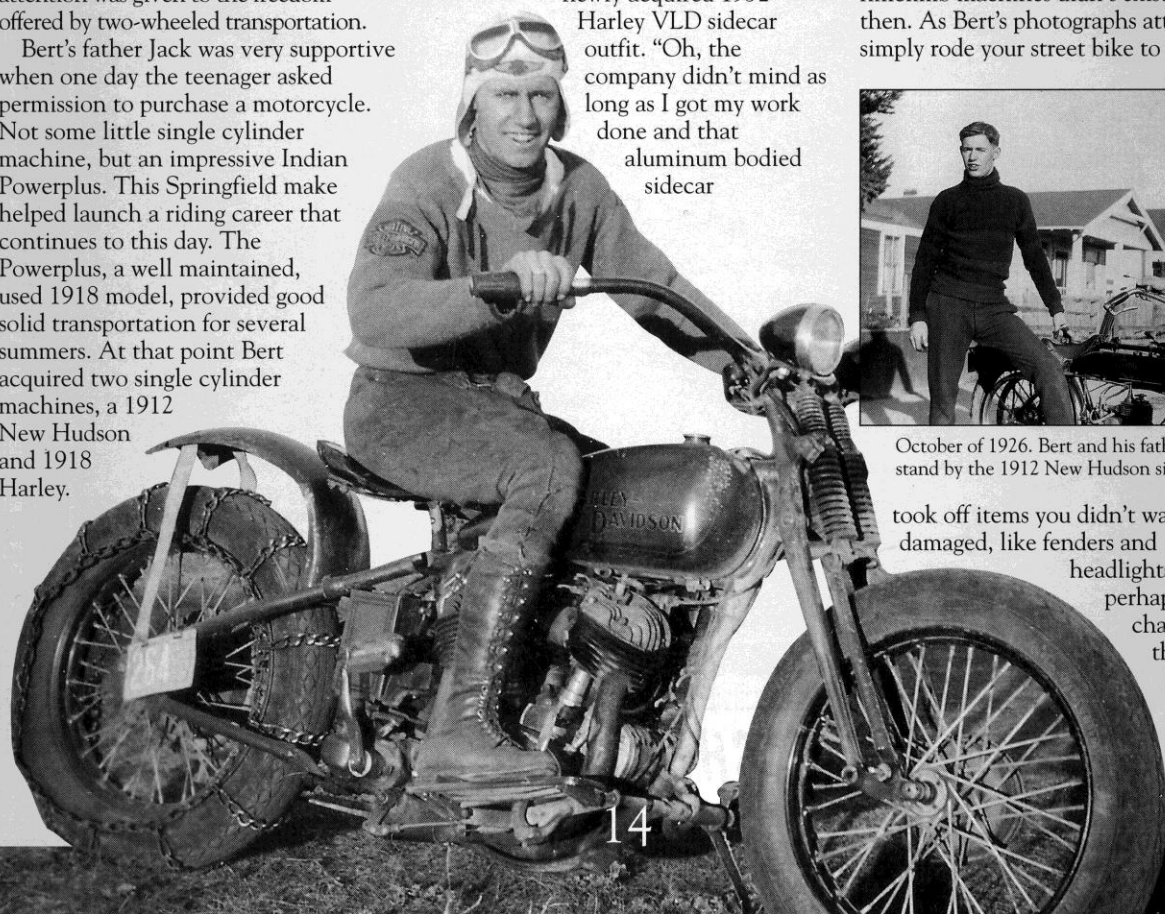
made it real handy. It was a real beauty," Bert recalled.

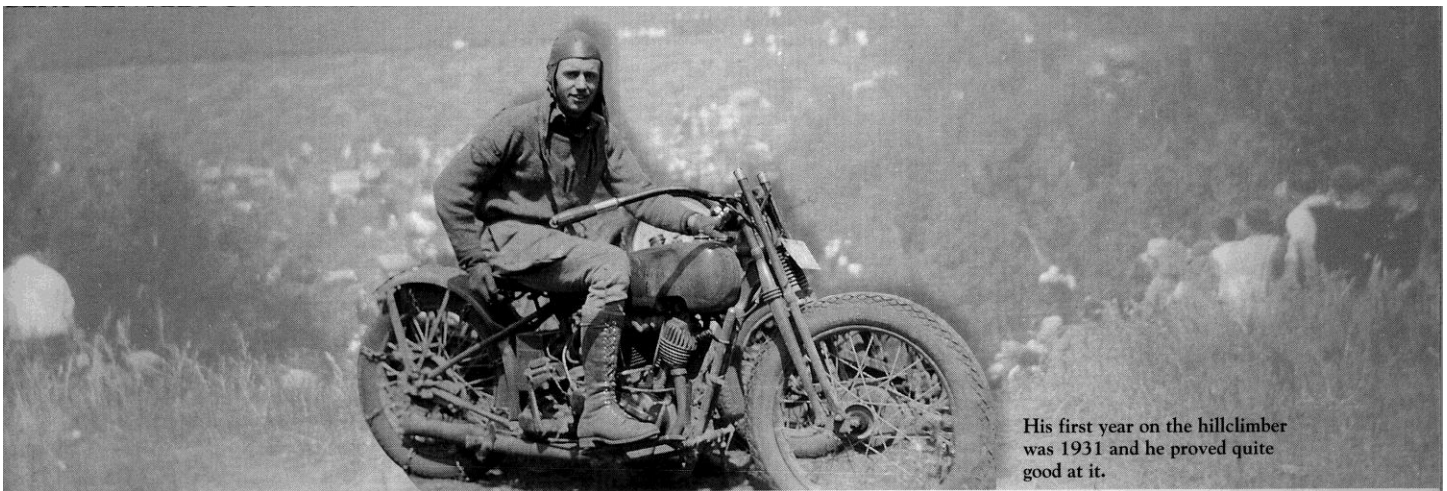
By the early '30s the cycling bug had bit hard. Some years he owned three or more machines. Bert felt the desire to enter a few competitive events and soon tried his hand at hillclimbing. Most of the local hillclimb activities took place in the Banff area, just 75 miles west of Calgary. Bert's Harleys were pressed into service for these sporting duties. Bert campaigned a 45 DL, 74 JD and his trusty VLD. By the fall of 1932, his first year, he went home with the gold capturing the Western Canadian Hillclimb Championship. "No one made it to the top of the hill in those days. It just came down to who got the closest before falling off or stalling out," Bert said. Special hillclimb machines didn't exist back then. As Bert's photographs attest, you simply rode your street bike to the hill,



October of 1926. Bert and his father Jack stand by the 1912 New Hudson single.

took off items you didn't want damaged, like fenders and headlights, perhaps fitted chains to the rear tire and had at it.



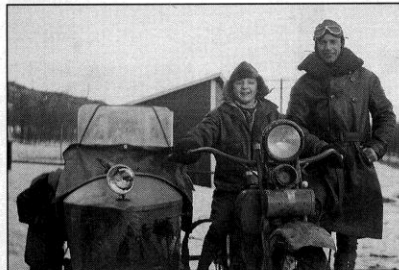


His first year on the hillclimber was 1931 and he proved quite good at it.

Although the majority of hillclimbs were held in the Banff area, Edmonton and Calgary also hosted their share. Each May 24th saw the boys in Calgary and by the Labor Day holiday weekend the hillclimb action moved to Edmonton. Edmonton, Alberta is over 170 miles from Calgary and the majority of it was on unpaved roads, but Bert and his friends thought nothing of riding all night on their journey to and from the Edmonton activity. Bert's expertise on the hills was confirmed once again when in 1932 he won the Alberta Hillclimb Championship.

By the early '30s the stock market crash of 1929 was making its effects felt world-wide. Calgary wasn't spared this devastating economic downturn but, as motorcyclists of the day knew, their form of transportation delivered more smiles per gallon than any car. Bert and his riding buddies still managed to scrape up the gas money needed for weekend trips to Banff, the gateway of the Canadian Rockies. This picturesque area captivated the cyclists and became one of their favorite destinations. Undaunted by economic storms or the real thing from Mother Nature, Bert rode his machines year round. Fitted with a sidecar when riding conditions dictated, Bert's trustworthy machines not only provided daily transportation but were employed for fishing and hunting excursions as well. "When the real cold weather set in we used our motorcycles to tow skiers on the frozen river. Oh, we didn't let winter slow us down any. I once rode my motorcycle across frozen Lake Louise—and that was in November," Bert commented.

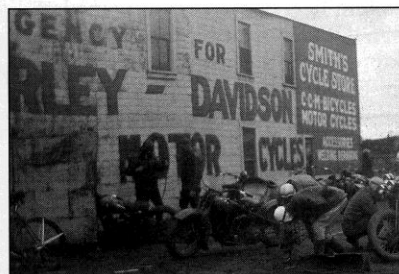
Bert's local motorcycle club, the Calgary Motorcycle Club, was called on occasionally to perform more mundane tasks when compared to hillclimbs. One duty was crowd control. "Every Christmas day the city of Calgary would sponsor a seven mile foot race which drew huge crowds. Our club was asked



Riding year-round was what they did.

by the local police to help with traffic duties" Bert recalled, "We pitched right in—glad to help out."

One of his more memorable road trips was a club run from Calgary to Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, Washington and home again. Considering the road conditions during the mid-'30s, this

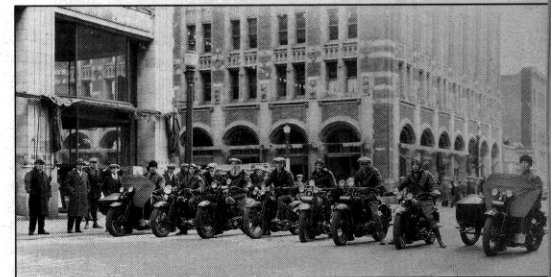


The Harley-Davidson dealership in Edmonton.

was a real adventure. Adding to the excitement of an extended road trip the motor on Bert's 1928 Harley JD

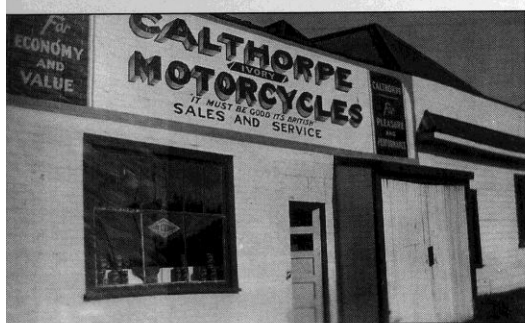
sidecar rig packed it in near Spokane, Washington. "I am sure it didn't help that I was carrying all my buddies' gear in the sidecar, but we managed to purchase a spare engine from Brush Cycle in Spokane and were soon on our way again," Bert recalled.

When true motorcyclists daydream their thoughts most likely come around to owning their own bike shop. In Bert's case he made the dream a reality if only for a short time. In 1936 with his best friend Len Pease, the two of them scrapped together the seed money to open a shop in Calgary. The Harley dealership was spoken for so they acquired the British Calthorpe line. By the mid-'30s Calthorpe was producing



A chilly Christmas morning as members of the Calgary Motorcycle club prepare to lend a hand with crowd control.

single cylinder OHV machines from 250cc up to 500cc. The Ivory Calthorpes with these engine displacements all featured dual port heads which proved quite reliable. The machines were very reasonably priced which Bert believes helped with their sales record of eight bikes in their first year. "This was a very good start when considering that in 1936 the Calgary Harley-Davidson dealer only sold two



Bert's Calthorpe dealership in Calgary. The sign reads "It must be good, it's British."

or three new machines," Bert said. It was short-lived though. The world was heading for war so Bert and Len shut down their operation in late 1938 (Calthorpe carried on until the outbreak of hostilities in 1939). Throughout this three year business adventure, Bert was wise enough to keep his day job but this too was interrupted by the war.

Bert had been a member of the Royal Canadian Army Reserve Transportation Service Corps since 1929. He served in the role of adjutant in Canada's peacetime army. On August 28, 1939 his reserve army unit was mobilized. He found himself in the army under full-time conditions and for the duration. "They wasted no time in getting us over there. By December 21 we were on a transport headed for England. I spent the Christmas of 1939 as part of a convoy in the North Atlantic," Bert remembered.

Bert's assignment was as an officer with the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps supplying virtually all the materials needed by an army in battle.

"Before the

Normandy invasion most of my time overseas was spent in England training constantly. We had a brief period in June of 1940 where we occupied some ground on the Brest peninsula until some German Panzer tanks showed up, nasty business. Other than that, it was training, training, training. But this was the reason, when we reached Normandy things went as smooth as oiled silk," Bert said. Bert, now a staff officer on the HQ of the First Canadian Army, entered Normandy on D-Day+10 and went right to work transporting material to the front line troops. As the Allies moved their way steadily eastward, Bert found himself in Antwerp, Belgium as the German V-2 rockets rained down on the helpless city. "The V-2s were really nasty. I didn't like them very much," recalled Bert.



That smile says it all. Bert Bentley AMCA #229 loves old motorcycles.

By the early spring of 1945 Bert was on his way back to Canada for his one month furlough. The Canadian Army's policy during the war was one month's leave for every five years of service and Bert had his five in by this time. When his leave was up it didn't pay to ship him back to Europe with the war winding down, so Bert finished the last few months at an eastern Canadian base.

Now, Bert Bentley is a very modest man. During our interview he all but skipped over the fact that he was presented with the Order of the British Empire for his efforts during WWII. The full title is Officer of the Order of the British Empire, also known as O.B.E. This prestigious award was created to acknowledge non-combatant services to the war effort. Only a scant 281 Canadian military personnel have received the award since its inception in 1918.

After hostilities ended in '45 Bert was once again back in the peacetime army.

A favorite hang-out in Edmonton, the King Edward Cafe.

"It didn't agree with me, the paperwork was overwhelming. I guess I wasn't cut out for peacetime army life," he commented. Bert eventually settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba where he was Director of Civil Defense for the Province and retired from this position in 1974. As far back as 1953 Bert was collecting antique motorcycles. "I just liked the old ones better. At one time I had 16 motorcycles in my basement" Bert mentioned. Over the years, Bert has owned 38 different machines and six bicycle motors. They range from A to V. His list included Ariel, BSA, Cleveland, Ducati, Henderson, Reading Standard and Velocette to name a few. Without much hesitation though, when asked for his favorite machine, Bert said, "My 1928 Scott Flying Squirrel. I bought it in 1954. It had been taken apart and I carried it home in cans." The restoration took four years to complete and parts chasing burned up many hours. Bert sold the last of his machines a few years ago to his close friend and fellow Buffalo Chapter member, Ross Metcalfe. "I miss them terribly if nothing else than to have something to swear at," Bert mused. It's hard to keep a real enthusiast down though, for word has it that Bert recently transported a slender little 1970 Motobecane home in the trunk of his car. Bert's involvement with motorcycles isn't over yet and we know the newly acquired Motobecane should at least give him something to good-naturedly swear at.

