

The HUTCHINSON HUNDRED

ASK any enthusiastic follower of motor cycle racing to name the most well-known and important motor cycle race to be held in England, and whether he be spectator or rider, he is certain to reply "The Hutch," a popular abbreviation of that very famous "Bemsee" event, The Hutchinson Hundred, which takes its name from the Club's oldest Challenge Trophy and, war years excepted, has been an annual event since 1925.

In recent years, the character of the race has changed completely. In 1925 "The Hutch" was a hundred miles track event run at Brooklands on a handicap basis and open to all who cared to enter. Since the war it has become a road race. Only the reward remains the same, the magnificent Mellano Trophy, a large silver cup originally valued at two hundred pounds and presented by Mr. A. V. Mellano, of the Hutchinson Tyre Company, in 1925.

The change in the character of "The Hutch" has been brought about by the different circumstances which now exist. Brooklands was the home of "Bemsee" from the time the Club was founded in 1909 until 1939. When the Club was reformed in 1947 it was homeless. For a time it organised racing at Dunholme, then Haddenham, then Silverstone, then Goodwood, then back to Silverstone.

Entries of forty riders for pre-war Hutchinson Hundred races were considered to be excellent. Post-war races attract five times this number and are an embarrassment to the organisers. With such large entries several difficulties arise which make the running of handicap races

none too easy, and because of these difficulties, handicap races have been abandoned.

There are other changes. The machines are out-and-out road racing motor cycles. The race has International status. There are fuel restrictions; alcohol is not permitted, nor is supercharging, for these are barred by the F.I.M. regulations under which the meeting is held.

Brooklands was the one place in the British Isles where a motor cycle could be ridden on full throttle for hours on end if the rider and the machine could stand the strain, and an average speed of the order of 90 m.p.h. for a distance of one hundred miles was a severe test of the man and machine. Consequently the winning of "Bemsee's" annual classic, the Hutchinson Hundred, was an achievement of which the victor could be justifiably proud.

Apart from the yearly variations, the pattern of the fourteen races held at Brooklands (1925 to 1938 inclusive) remained unchanged. Any size of engine up to the top limit of 1000 c.c. was eligible; competitors were free to use any type of fuel—the majority chose alcohol—and, if they pleased, they could employ supercharging. Some did. Three-fifties were the most successful class of machine and they won the race seven times; the two-fifties won three, the five-hundreds two, and the remaining two races went to a big twin



*The starting grid, 1936.
(photo: The Motor Cycle,
London)*



The last race at Brooklands was run in pouring rain.

*(photo: The Motor Cycle,
London)*

of 1000 c.c. and a tiddler of 175 c.c. Only once did a rider on the scratch mark win, the late Ben Bickell in 1932, and only once was the race won at 100 m.p.h., by L. J. Archer in 1933. An innovation introduced in 1931 was that for the first time sidecars were allowed to compete, but it was not until twenty years later that a "chair" won the Mellano Trophy.

A feature of post-1946 races is the shocking wet conditions in which several have taken place. In marked contrast the seven years 1925 to 1931 provided reasonably good weather, but the 1932 event was run off in the worst possible conditions and a downpour of rain. Only seven of the twenty nine starters completed the distance. The winner was Ben Bickell from the scratch mark, riding a 498 c.c. Bickell-J.A.P. (tuned by his brother Joe) who averaged 99.61 m.p.h. and despite the atrocious weather lapped consistently at 103 m.p.h. It was in the following year, 1933, that the "Hutch" was won for the first and only time at 100 m.p.h. More remarkable was that the winner, Les Archer Senior, accomplished this on a three-fifty, a 348 c.c. KTT Velocette, and was the first occasion on which a three-fifty had covered one hundred miles in the hour on a British Track.

The last of the Brooklands races was the 1938 event, which took place in torrential rain.

After the war years (1939-45) conditions were greatly changed. "Bemsee" was reformed in 1947 but the Club was homeless, for Brooklands was not available. The Hutchinson Hundred as a race pure and simple ceased, and the Mellano Trophy was awarded to the winner of a sealed handicap, the riders taking part in separate races. This was because entries had become so unwieldy.

At the 1948 meeting the number received for the 100-mile race for 250 c.c., 350 c.c. and 1000 c.c. classes was overwhelming. There were 100 three-fifties, and they raced amongst themselves. With so many runners it was difficult for the timekeepers and lap-scorers to keep track of everybody and, as a consequence, some riders were missed. Eventually all the bothers were overcome, but the organisers realised that a different arrangement would have to be planned for future races.

The 1949 Hutchinson Hundred was held at Silverstone, the first motor cycle race meeting to be held on this circuit. Separate races with an overall sealed handicap for the Mellano Trophy was again used, but the difficulties previously experienced with Lap-scoring were overcome.

The 1950 race was notable for two things; the shocking weather and, for the first time in the history of the race, the Mellano Trophy was won by a three-wheeler, Cyril Smith and his Norton-Watsonian outfit. Curiously enough, a sidecar outfit won the Trophy in the following year, the Norton-Watsonian combination ridden by Eric Oliver, in weather conditions that could not have been bettered, a marked contrast to the previous year.

After 1951 sealed handicaps were abandoned. The present method, used for two years, is to award the Mellano Trophy to the rider whose average race speed exceeds the existing class lap record by the greatest margin, or, if no rider exceeds the class lap record, to the rider whose average speed is nearest to the class lap record. That this solution is ideal the Club does not pretend, for the ideal is the handicap race pure and simple, but, paradoxically, it is the enthusiasm for racing which has created the organisers' biggest obstacle.