

# Nibbo's getting to the 2013 TT



It's 5am in the middle of January and an unusual sight greets travellers at Birmingham airport. A man in a vest, shorts and flip-flops shivers his way across the snow-covered car park. 28-year-old Michael Niblett from Hinckley in Leicestershire has been on honeymoon. Nibbo and his lovely wife, Claire are returning from the thirty degree heat of Barbados, and the weather is a bit of a shock to the system! It's a busy time too, with a change of job on the horizon, but it isn't long before his thoughts turn towards June, and preparations for his second trip to the TT races.

I asked Michael whether he thought married life would change his attitude towards racing. "Claire is very supportive. She doesn't particularly like me racing at the TT, but we went to school together and she used to come and watch me race years before we got together. She doesn't enjoy watching as much now, but comes along and is totally behind me going back to the Island again this year", he replies.

Michael's first experience of road racing was at Dundrod in 2011, where he finished in a creditable third position in the Dundrod 150



*Nibbo at Douglas Road Corner;  
Photo courtesy Peter Faragher - www.wpfotos.co.uk.*

National race, and he was hooked from the start. "All my focus is now on the TT though", he says. "Last year's TT was the most amazing experience of my racing career and is now the only race I truly care about. Any other racing is just about getting ready for the TT to be honest".

Before his trip to the UGP, Michael had been harassing his boss at work for sponsorship, when his boss came up with the suggestion of having people pay to get their names on his fairing. Michael then used his Facebook page to launch "Help get Nibbo to the 2011 UGP." The next year this became "Help get Nibbo to the 2012 TT" and the 2013 page was launched at the start of the year. For £50, as well as seeing your name blast round the TT circuit, you will also get an auto-graphed picture of Michael in action. "Last year nearly all my budget for the TT came through the site, which is great when you're a privateer. I'm hoping to run two bikes this year", he adds. "I'd love to attract a decent amount again. At least half of the donations came from family and friends, but there were a fair few welcome strangers who sent dona-

tions too".

Despite waxing lyrical about his TT experience to date, his debut year didn't really go according to plan, "it was a bit up and down" he says. Practice week started fantastically and he was up amongst the fastest newcomers, which surprised a few as he was a relative unknown compared to the likes of Karl Harris, Lee Johnston and Jamie Hamilton. By Wednesday night's session he had upped the pace to over 115 mph, but after that things began to go wrong with a number of niggling problems. His old ZX10 began to lose power and eventually stopped on Friday night at Guthrie's. The next day he had to retire from the Superbike TT at the first pit-stop with a blown rear shock, and overall he was "a little disappointed".

Some of the most spectacular images from TT 2012 were of Nibbo. He remembers only having three real "moments" during the whole fortnight and feels that he was slightly unlucky that two of these ended up on camera, and on his Facebook page! On the first night of practice he turned into Bedstead Corner and realised he was going to run wide.

Demonstrating considerable coolness for a Mountain Course beginner, he remembered the low kerb on the exit and headed straight for it!

The second moment, which was captured by our very own Dutch representative Gert Meulman, was at the end of Cronk-y-Voddy during the Superstock race. The bike wasn't behaving after repairing the rear shock, and despite looking like he was attempting to negotiate the fast right-hander moto-X style, Michael maintains that he "hardly felt anything at all on the bike". He admits that the photos do look "crazy" but nonchalantly describes the whole incident as "running a little wide". It did cause him to wind it in a bit though, as he knew the bike wasn't handling.

His third near-miss came when he turned into the first Waterworks bend too early and went gardening. However, he was making a definite effort to build up slowly and adds in his defence that "from speaking to other new boys last year, most of them had much bigger scares than me, they just weren't on camera!"

So what of his plans for this year? He intends to do a couple of meetings with his local EMRA club, the Spring Cup at Scarbor-

ough and some Thundersport rounds before June. He'll be back with a newly built ZX10 Kawasaki courtesy of Astro Racing, and has added a 2012 Triumph Daytona, courtesy of Les Liney Vehicle Hire, for the Supersport class. Les owns the bike and was a newcomer at the 2012 MGP.

Michael recently moved jobs from the Triumph dealership in Wolverhampton, where he was the brand manager, to become Dealer Principal in the sister store at Stratstone Triumph in Leicester. I asked him if he felt obliged to race the bike given his links with the company. "Definitely not. It's a brilliant road bike and I raced one as a wildcard in the Triple Challenge last year and loved it. I think it will work really well at the TT with the torque advantage over an in-line four. I have always done pretty well riding 600s and I'm really looking forward to it, though in theory I'm a bit big for them". At that stage I mentioned to him that the word "Nibbo" was listed in the on-line Urban Dictionary where it is defined as "someone who eats a lot of food but never gains any weight." He laughs. "I wish. I have struggled keeping down to a reasonable racing weight over the last few years" he adds.

Nibbo at the end of Cronk-y-Voddy!!  
Photo courtesy Gert Meulman.



He doesn't plan a lot of changes for the TT this year. Last year, he stayed at a house away from the paddock and feels that he lost out a bit on the atmosphere of the event. So this year he will set up camp in the paddock. "I know a couple of the experienced riders and they have been very good at checking out how things have been going and offering some tips. I went to Macau in 2003 and

2007 with IRTA boss and Manx resident Mike Trimby. Through him I was introduced to John McGuinness, Michael Rutter and Guy Martin, and I also used to race with Guy's younger brother". But his biggest supporters have always been his family, who he'd like to thank for always being behind him 100%.

**Philip Windrum**



One of the scariest parts of the Course – Nibbo at Ballagarey;  
Photo courtesy Peter Faragher – www.wpfotos.co.uk

## Race Programme - TT 2013

<b>Saturday 1st June:</b>	TT Superbike	12.00	6 laps
	Sidecar TT Race 1	15.00	3 laps
<b>Monday 3rd June:</b>	Supersport Race 1	10.45	4 laps
	Superstock Race	14.00	4 laps
<b>Wednesday 5th June:</b>	TT Zero Challenge	10.45	1 lap
	Supersport Race 2	12.00	4 laps
	Sidecar Race 2	14.30	3 laps
<b>Friday 7th June:</b>	Lightweight TT	10.45	3 laps
	Senior TT Race	13.00	6 laps



Charlie live on air, with Roy and Rose: Photo courtesy  
– Mike Hammonds

Charlie has the privilege  
of interviewing Joey Dunlop.



## Charlie Williams

One of the first articles I wrote on taking the mantle of the TTSC Magazine way back in the early 1990s was in conjunction with Charlie Williams. I remember travelling to his shop – “Everything But Bikes” – in Chester with my rather over large tape recorder, the days of conversing by e-mail still on a far horizon; for me it was a brilliant day out, as earlier on, I’d visited one of my boyhood heroes, Tommy Robb, at his Warrington garage. It was from here on that the hobby which has kept me busy ever since took fruition. Talking with Charlie at TT 2012, we thought it high time that we ran another article, this time looking at the changes which have occurred at the TT in the last couple of decades.

For our younger readers, Charlie Williams was one the top exponents of road racing in the ‘70s & ‘80s, having made his MGP debut with a 5th place, first newcomer home, in 1970, following it up with a victory the year after. This was actually after his first TT outing in ‘71 as MGP competitors were allowed to compete in TT Production classes in those days – he finished as runner-up in the 250 category. Charlie took the ‘72 TT by storm, six starts with excellent results – two seconds, 4th, 5th and 6th.

His first victory – the 250 Race – followed twelve months later, in a capacity class he dominated in subsequent years with four more wins. He ended up with eight ‘outright’ victories, the others being ‘73 250 Production and the F2 and Junior of 1980; there was also a class victory when he shared his Honda with Eddie Roberts to be the first 500 machine home in the 1975 10 lap Production Race. He bowed out of TT racing in 1984 with a second place in the Junior TT, having retired from short circuit racing some three years earlier.

Charlie exchanged the twist grip for the microphone in 1989 broadcasting from the Round Bar at the Palace Hotel with Roger Attyeo, then being joined by Geoff Cannell when Roger left the Island: Charlie continues, “we broadcasted from the Palace apart from two occasions, once from Summerland, which was awful as we had to compete with Suzi Quattro’s sound check every evening and the other time from the Villa, ok but very quiet”. Another move was soon on the agenda, that to the Douglas Head studio, but by this time Charlie was running solo as Geoff had left.

Nearly up to date, with a move to the Grandstand three years ago to a

purpose built studio, viewed positively by Charlie, “this is without doubt the best situation I’ve been in; it’s a better environment and is at the heart of the TT.”

So, we’ve moved to the present day – what is a typical working day for Charlie at the TT? “Practice Week is very busy as I’m up at 6.30am, at the studio for 7am and then on the air from 7.30am - 9am. I’m back at the studio for 12.30pm to broadcast from 1-2pm. During the day I’m arranging for future guests, then at 5.45pm I’m back at the Grandstand to cover evening practice with Chris Kinley, finishing around 9pm”

Technology never ceases to progress, so how have such changes assisted Charlie in the job he loves so much? “For me, technological changes have helped a little as I can now communicate with the listeners via both internet and text, which I obviously couldn’t do in the early years. The morning show is now streamed live between 8am-9am, so listeners can see both myself and my guests. However, at my Cross Four Ways commentary point for the pre-TT Classic, I still use a stopwatch as I have no positions, times, etc fed to me via transponder/laptop. During TT practice, Chris Kinley and I do benefit by having a lap top which gives us lap times and speed trap figures and we are still linked to the tower for any additional info.”

With due respect to some competitors who were circulating in TT races, in say the late 1990s, the quality of the entry has improved in recent years, so why, in Charlie’s mind, have top short circuit racers such as Josh Brookes, Steve Plater, Karl Harris, etc, decided to pit their skills against the vagries of the Mountain Course? Charlie’s reply to this was straight to the point: “Money”, but he did expand, “the majority of BSB riders are so poorly

paid and I believe that the sums of money that can be earned at the TT are very attractive. Also, the TT can offer great publicity – Tom Birchall told me that he received far more recognition from riding at the TT than he did by winning the Sidecar World Championship. Steve Plater was amazing, hopefully Josh Brookes will show that sort of dedication and promise.”

Of course it’s not just been a change in racing personnel, there has been a recent innovation with respect to machinery, about which Charlie enthuses, “like so many others I love to hear something different than the Japanese 4 cylinder 4 stroke engines, so with the introduction of the lightweight/super-twins race, we got just that - a great move which will only improve with time. Some die-hards will say that there was a lot more variation in noise during the 70/80s, but this is not altogether true as there were that many TZ250/350s with TZ352s in the Senior, all sounding the same that it was virtually two and a half Yamaha TZ races. The classes at the TT have to reflect what is happening on the short circuit scene, and with that in mind I think the organisers are doing a very good job.

We’ve already touched on changes in the infrastructure at the Grandstand, but whilst Charlie feels facilities have improved greatly, they still have a long way to go in comparison to some short circuits... “the paddock area is very cramped, especially



*Charlie at the Waterworks, Senior TT 1982. He stopped at Sulby on lap two, intending to retire, but the late Terry Shepherd, who was spectating, there spotted a kink in the fuel pipe, which, after finishing his pint, Charlie rectified, continued, then on the next flying lap, broke Mike Hailwood's 500 lap record.*

the Parc Ferme; thank goodness most of the current race bikes have electric starters, otherwise it would be mayhem in that area. We must remember however that things have changed drastically over the years with the huge race transporters and the required hospitality areas."

Average lap speeds for solos have increased by about 10mph in the time span we are considering, with newcomers even breaking the 120mph barrier; how does Charlie account for this increase, and at what stage might lap speeds peak? "Well,

to me the increased lap speeds are obvious... huge improvements to the Course at places such as Brandish, the stunning power output, and the fact that handling and braking of the current machines is amazing. As for the peak? They seem to have reached a plateau just lately, but I remember not that long ago, when a 120mph lap seemed impossible. However, in the mid-70s, the late John Williams foresaw the 130mph lap - we thought he was mad!"

As for the three-wheelers, Charlie feels "whilst I don't think the quality of the entry has improved that much, the preparation of the outfits and the professionalism of many of the teams has improved greatly. I like the sidecars, riders and passengers... they're good fun, interesting to talk with"

Substantial improvements have been made 'off the track', the event certainly becoming more corporate; Charlie was quick to agree when I made this point,

## Susan Jenness Trophy

As announced in the last issue, the Susan Jenness Trophy will be presented to Debbie Barron during TT fortnight

Debbie became the first local, Isle of Man female TT sidecar driver - indeed, one of the few women to have piloted a three-wheeler outfit around the Mountain Course. After failing to qualify for Sidecar A, Debbie and her passenger, fellow Manxie, Robert Lunt, managed to make the requisite speed by Wednesday's second race, again revealing the skill and determination shown in securing her Mountain Course licence during the previous few months. Although the crew came home in last - 33rd - position at a race average speed of 86.87mph, the Committee felt it a truly meri-

torious performance.

The Susan Jenness Trophy is presented in memory of Susan who lost her life some years ago whilst marshalling a UK off-road event. Arrangements will be made for Susan's husband, Mick, to present the trophy to Debbie.



*Photo courtesy Equipe Ajax*

"I think television coverage has played the biggest part in the corporate success of the TT. Greenlight did a good job with its coverage, but North One has raised the bar during the last three years. The TT has most definitely become popular as a result of this, but a lot of the credit for reaching its present status in the motorcycling world has to go to the current organising team. The TT is probably more popular than ever, especially when you consider the amount of good, well presented sports events, etc available to the public these days. Last year's event was getting over 800.000 viewers on ITV4, compared with the British Touring Car Championship at 200.000 and Moto GP on Eurosport, 250.000."

Our chat turned again to the future, wondering if we'd still be fulfilling our current roles in say, ten years - I pushed Charlie into making suggestions as to what stage in its evolution the TT would be at by then...another quick reply. "I'm not sure I'm the best person to answer that one, as ten years ago I would never have predicted that the TT would be where it is now! I also thought there would have been more of an upturn in the zero machines by now, but I do believe there is still time for them to become an integral part of the race programme by the time we write the next article. We may, by then, be watching Moto 3 machines on the Glencrutchery Road startline - who knows?"

...but what Charlie does know is that "Michael Dunlop has to be the biggest potential TT star of the future, he has amazing talent and will definitely improve with age," adding, "we were surely robbed of one of the best talents when Hutchy's TT career suffered after his Silverstone accident. Incidentally, I thought his performance at last year's TT was amazing considering the extent of his injuries."

What is definitely looming in the not too distant future is the Classic TT, being run this year, in conjunction with the MGP - Charlie thinks it is a good idea, hoping it works as well as the organisers expect. I then mentioned Nick Jefferies... Charlie knew where I was going with this... "ok, Patrick Walker of www.worksracing.co.uk did suggest the possibility me of riding his very nice Manx Norton in this event as I had ridden it at Silverstone as a one-off invitation ride last October and I do hope to ride it again in a couple of rounds of the Lansdowne Trophy this year. Although I would really like to ride at the TT again, I think it would be unfair to my family. I would like to take part in the MGP winners' parade, but at the time of writing this has not been agreed."

In conclusion, I asked Charlie if he could make one improvement to the TT, what would it be? "I would like to see more quality, serious riders from overseas competing to give it a further boost on the world stage." I wouldn't bet against this, or many other innovations for that matter as the TT now moves with the times, placing itself in the forefront of the motorcycle racing world - I wonder what will form the basis of our next discussion?



*Aboard Patrick Walker's Manx Norton*