

## The Thundercat diaries

Bike *Yamaha Thundercat 600*  
Rider *Paul Harris*



# “Truly the home of British motor racing”



Once I liked Donington and thought all Bernie's bullying of the BRDC over Silverstone's

slipshod facilities was pointless. We go to the races to watch the races, right?

Actually, no. Like some slippery spin doctor I've now reversed my position: racing's the whole point of the day, but all the other bits and bobs don't half make a difference.

As soon as you pass through the Silverstone gates you sense everything has been planned to the Nth degree: the signage is clear; the campsites spacious and civilised; the toilet blocks big and permanent; the showers decent. Then there is the free bus to shuttle you around the track, the information points to help in the event of a crisis and the flow of free information about schedules and where to find what you need.

If there is a criticism of Silverstone it's that it lacks one killer viewing spot the like of which Donington had with the Craner Curves. But while there's no one place that's great, there are a lot of places that are good – pick one with a big screen so you can see what's going on elsewhere on the circuit and you're set fair for a weekend's racing.

I have respect for Donington but it wasn't long ago that Silverstone was being run by ageing fuddy-duddys in flat caps and driving old blower Bentleys, whilst Donington was in the hands of a fast young entrepreneur who was going to take the place to the next level. Now it seems the old boys knew what they were doing and it's the entrepreneur who's ended up out of his depth. No doubt Donington will return but it appears we the public are far better off heading to Silverstone for our racing fix.



### 'CAT FACTS

**Current mileage:**

56,953

**This month's miles:**

556

**This month's mpg:**

51.3

### WHAT I'VE LEARNT

➤ Slowing down on the motorway is best done on the hard shoulder

➤ Thundercats are not cutting edge, but are remembered fondly by former owners

➤ Follow Paul's Cat adventures and more on our blog [ridediaries.blogspot.com](http://ridediaries.blogspot.com)

## ON THE ROAD

### Touring Ireland's beautiful west coast: the good, the bad and the very broken

The trip had started out well enough with 12 of us taking group photographs outside Belfast City Hall. A slow run through the suburbs, picking up a few more guys on the way, and then down the Ards Peninsula to catch the ferry from Portaferry to Strangford.

On and on over the hills we went through Kilkeel towards Newcastle at the foot of the Mourne Mountains. Rostrevor came and went, followed by a fast run up one side of pristine Carlingford Lough, briefly touching Newry, then hugging the old Newry canal south for lunch in medieval Carlingford.

We used main roads for a quick burst to our first overnight stop at the Greville Arms Hotel in Mullingar. So far, all had run like clockwork. However Roy, one of our three American bikers, had put three litres of diesel into his hired Tiger 800 (courtesy of Philip McCallen Motorcycles, Lisburn) and it refused to start. A quick phone call to Sam at McCallen's and a replacement bike was delivered to Mullingar.

Next destination, Galway via the Cliffs of Moher – where, en route, disaster struck again. The unruly Triumph Sprint of Karl, our second American visitor, cracked its sump on an unfriendly kerb. Shortly after, Peter from Dublin was blown over while attempting a U-turn at 1mph into the teeth of an Atlantic gale.

We pushed on to the Cliffs of Moher with their 700-foot drop to the sea – no one ventured too close to the edge. Next stop Galway city, or so we thought; a damaged battery meant the Sprint was dead. Storm clouds were gathering but thankfully a local farmer took pity on us and conjured up a set of jump leads that could have started the Titanic. With the Triumph alive and kicking we were in biking nirvana around the Corkscrew Hill in the Burren area. A quick sprint to Galway saw us revived with hot showers, Guinness and a Chinese meal. A second call to McCallen's bike hire saw another replacement Sprint on its way. By this stage, our third American, Peter, was feeling nervous...

The next day we set off for Westport. We lunched at Leenane where the film *The Field* was shot and arrived safely at our destination. The Clew Bay in Westport is a great hotel, with secure bike parking and sublime Guinness.

Up to Sligo for the last two nights. The hostel at the docks in Sligo town was somewhat below par. Ride out next day to Downpatrick Head in County Mayo – huge sea stack, not to be missed. After lunch at Ceide Fields, a Neolithic site, we went further west to Belmullet. Out that night to the fantastic Hargadon's Bar in Sligo centre. Great atmosphere.

My Ducati Multistrada had run faultlessly up to now but what I originally thought was a leaking fork seal turned out to be a weeping oil cooler. So I decided to make a run back home to Belfast, leaving the remaining group, now down to six, to do the Donegal leg. Fate struck again near the grave of WB

### “Peter was blown over attempting a U-turn at 1mph”

Yeates at Drumcliffe, when John's 30-year-old Suzuki GS1000 broke its clutch cable. He was able to start in second gear and turned for home.

The remaining five riders toured on through Donegal town to bleak but beautiful Glencolmcille.

The next day Michael G, Karl, Roy, Peter S and Alan rode to the hallowed ground that is the North-West 200. Their journey took them along the Causeway Coast Road, rated as one of the top five road trips worldwide.

And so, homeward bound, our bikers made one more stop, paying homage to two of Northern Ireland's greatest-ever racers – the Dunlop brothers, Joey and Robert. The Memorial Garden in Ballymoney is a tasteful tribute to these heroes. With plaques read our bikers set off to return three trusty Triumphs to an ever-patient Sam at McCallen's.

**Richard Donaldson**

