

## THE MILES ISSUE

# 'It's just a number'

High miles means unreliable, right? Not necessarily. Looked after right, any bike can shrug off 100,000 miles – as these owners prove...

Interviews John Westlake

**W**hen a dealer assesses your bike for a part-ex and sucks his teeth at the 20,000-mile odometer reading, it's easy to think big miles are bad. But mechanically speaking, that's cobblers. On these pages we have a 173,000-mile Ducati Monster that's still happily gallivanting around Scotland, a bloke who put 140,000 miles on a 1969 Triumph Trident, and another who did 257,000 miles on a Honda XBR500 and never broke down. Okay, they know their way around an engine, but their message is simple: follow the service schedule, use good oil, and the odometer reading means bugger all. So, settle back, soak up some high-mile wisdom, and then a) buy a high-mile bargain, or b) stick a chunk of carefree miles on the bike you've got.



You don't need a mantelpiece to give something pride of place in your living room



Still an ace trackday tool – and it still looks the part



The Gavia Pass: a 2100-mile round trip from Noocastle

## 1992 Honda FireBlade, 108,273 miles

Carl Tiffany, 68, retired bike cop from Wigan

'I've recently retired it, and now it lives in my living room so I can look at it. Partly that was out of respect because it's been such a good bike, but also the riding position was getting a bit much for my neck.

'I bought it brand new on 4 April 1992. It's been round Europe, all over the UK and on trackdays. It still keeps up with modern sportsbikes on the road quite easily – it steers so fast with that 16in wheel, but it grips beautifully.

'After the first three Honda services, I've done everything myself and it's never let me down. The only thing that went wrong was the thermostat but since I replaced that it's been fine. It's had synthetic oil every 5000 miles, and I did the shims at 40,000 miles and at 65,000 because it was getting a bit of a rattle, but I haven't touched them since – you can hear when they need doing. The build quality is so good that if you look after it, it'll just keep going – it's like all those carb-era 1990s Hondas: bulletproof.

'I'll admit that when it was seven years old I did consider chopping it in for a new one, but I'm glad I didn't. If I was to put oil, water and a battery in it, I know it would fire up first time. I absolutely love it.'

## 2016 Triumph Trophy 1200SE, 104,000 miles

Dave Badcock, 73, retired advertising executive from Newcastle

'I've had it from brand new and it's been great. I've been all over Europe, but also I used to ferry blood plasma from Newcastle to Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, through the night. That was a 600-mile round trip that I did once a week for 11 years. I also put on a lot of miles working for British Cycling as an escort rider for events – on one of them I was paid to ride to Prague to do an event. I rode back via Sweden [as you do – Ed].

'It's a good service interval on the Trophy, which is one reason I bought it. It's 10,000 for a minor service, 20,000 for a major, though that big one is expensive – around £1000. It's done by Triumph Newcastle, who are excellent.

'The last service was at 100,000 miles and the total was



£2000 because the cam chain guide had broken into three parts. When they told me it would be that expensive I did start looking for another bike, but I couldn't find anything I liked, and Triumph have stopped making the Trophy.

'There have been a few issues over the years. For example, the Trophy's electrics are a bit suspect – the wires get brittle at the joints and you get problems. I fit a new battery every two years because the bike is so susceptible to low voltage – it will refuse to do anything. This is a regular complaint.

'If you ride a bike a lot, things do happen, and I think they happen more than they did to bikes in the 1980s and '90s, when they were engineered rather than built to a price. But I've decided that I'm keeping the Trophy. I'm going to see who dies first – me or the bike.'

**What would Dave have over the Trophy? As Eric would say, there's no answer to that...**



**Honda XBR500, 257,575 miles**  
**Robert Koelher, 55, chemist from Belgium**

‘The main reason I love the XBR is its reliability – in 40 years I’ve ridden it over 250,000 miles and it has never broken down. It’s always got me where I needed to go.

‘I bought it second-hand in 1987, when I was at school, with money I borrowed from my dad. Soon I started doing long trips so I fitted panniers and an 80-litre aluminium top box. In the 1990s I toured Europe, then in the 2000s I toured Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Dubai. In 2011 I did an Africa trip and went from Mombasa in Kenya to Cape Town in South Africa. And then I discovered long-distance rallies, including some in the UK.

‘There were some issues with the camshaft and rockers – which turned out to be because the mechanic had fitted one of the bearings incorrectly – but even with a dying camshaft, it went for another 1000 miles to get me home. It’s not the most sexy motorbike, but it never stops. That’s why I keep using it for my trips. There are no electronics apart from the ignition, and everything else I can fix.

‘I never had to replace the engine, but I have done that, either when I had a good spare handy, or when the compression started dropping. I enjoy riding at full throttle so I notice when the power drops off and I tend to put in a better engine if I have one – I’ve put in five so far. The first gearbox lasted 150,000 miles though.

‘The original shocks only lasted the first big trip, which was with my girlfriend and our camping gear. The replacement Konis lasted until a couple of years ago [ie, around 175,000 miles], then I fitted some Wilbers shocks, which doubled the value of the bike. But they’re very good.’

**2004 Ducati Monster 1000ie, 173,156 miles**  
**Geoff Moores, 64, retired electronics engineer from Glasgow**

‘I bought it new in 2004, and for 10 years I commuted on it, but my main mileage was done touring abroad. I love its style and the way it puts the power down. It’s not got loads of power – it’s only about 80bhp – but it’s usable and I like that. I’ve never thought of selling it, partly because it wouldn’t be worth anything – who’d buy a 170,000-mile Ducati? It’s worth a lot more to me.

‘A few things have gone wrong. At 30,000 miles Ducati replaced the valve guides and exhaust under warranty. They also replaced the wiring harness because the oil light would flicker when it rained. It didn’t do much – it still flickers if it’s really wet. The rev counter stopped working so I replaced the stepper motor, which is off a Citroen C5 car.

‘At 98,000 miles the sprag [starter] clutch was replaced and I’ve been through three or four clutch baskets, six sets of clutch plates and three alternators – though it’s still on the original reg/rec. It eats wheel bearings – I have to replace those every 5000 miles as there are no dust seals, so the salt and rubbish goes straight in. I replaced the original shock at 148,000 with an Öhlins, not because it wasn’t working but because it was rusting and looked horrible.

‘My only tips are to stick to the service schedule and let it warm up – I don’t take it above 50mph until it’s up to temperature. I used Shell Advanced [oil] for the first 100,000 miles, then my local shop changed to Motul so I’ve used that. I change it every 6000 miles, as per the schedule.’



Spare rubber is essential when you do as many miles as Robert



Hitching a lift across Atatürk Reservoir in Turkey



A few miles short of seven times around the world



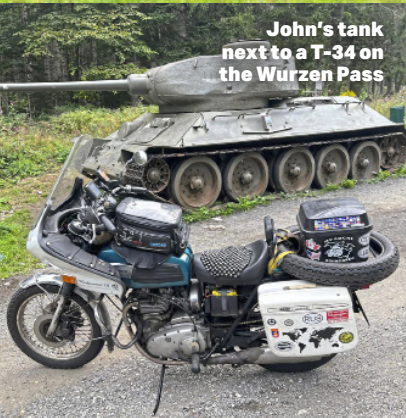
No flickering light on a day like this



The world's highest-mile Monster? It must be close



Big screen, back rest, bobbly seat: he knows comfort



John's tank next to a T-34 on the Wurzen Pass



It's just a scratch. Upright it and back on your way

‘I’ve ridden it over 250,000 miles and it’s always got me where I needed to go’



Robert and XBR500, Syrian desert, 2006. That top box will be rather hot...

**1969 Triumph Trident T160, 140,000 miles**  
**John Young, 65, retired accountant from Stafford**

I’ve ridden 500,000 miles on Hinckley triples, but the Trident T160 was my first love and I’ve barely been without one. I’ve got 16 of them, and since 2010 I’ve done 140,000 miles on this one. I’ve been to Russia four times, ridden the Alaska Highway from top to bottom, lapped the Great Lakes in Canada, ridden in every US state apart from Hawaii, and I’ve just come back from Morocco.

‘I bought it for the Iron Butt Rally [an 11,000-mile, 11-day shindig in the US] as it was deemed to be impossible on an old Triumph. They put me in the Hopeless Class, for bikes that stand no chance of finishing. When I left the start, one of the committee members said to his colleagues ‘if that bike makes the first checkpoint, I’ll change my name to Sally.’ Which is what they still call him, 14 years later, because I finished the whole thing.

‘I modified it so it would be capable of competing. I put a Windjammer fairing on it, created a seven gallon fuel tank and replaced the seven-pint oil tank with a 10-pint one. That means I only have to service it every 5000 miles.

‘I can keep it rolling no matter what happens. Well, unless a con rod comes out the side. Mounted in the nose of the fairing are four coils, so if one goes down, I can just move the leads across. The biggest thing that stops people using old bikes is fear. If something goes wrong on an old bike, you can generally fix it.’

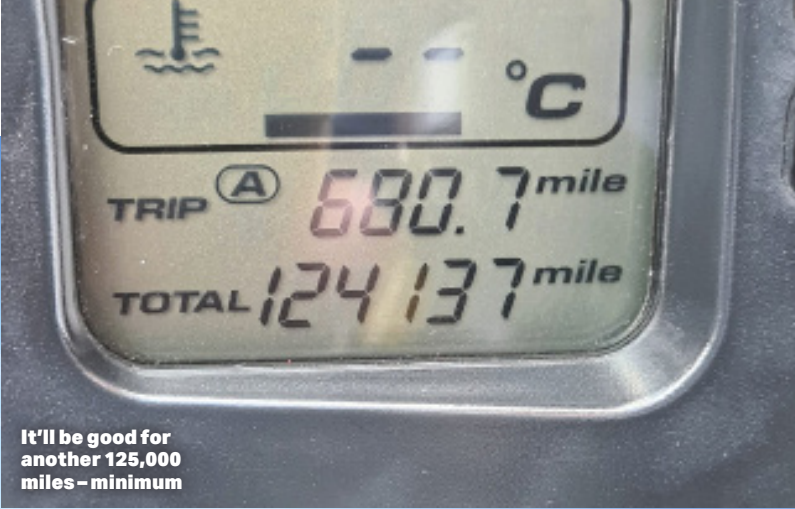


# On, and on, and...

## 1998 Honda VFR800RS, 124,137 miles

Graham Jeanes, 61, barber from London

I bought this with 111,000 miles on it. I was looking for an RS [an Anniversary Special made to celebrate Honda's 50th birthday – Ed] and I'd had a VFR750 before so I knew they were bulletproof. The old boy who was selling it had owned it from new and was meticulous – it had a full service history and he had an A4 binder crammed with every receipt for everything he'd ever bought. He'd put the mileage on during six trips to Europe. I could see it was well-looked after and I didn't mind about the high mileage – if it blew up, it'll cost me £200 for a second-hand engine. He only wanted £1300 for it, because of the mileage, so I bought it. I rode it home and spent some time going through it, replacing bearings, bushes, seals and what have you. I've been around bikes since I was piddling in my pants, I've raced, and owned loads of different models, and



It'll be good for another 125,000 miles – minimum

I reckon the VFR800 is among the best. It's bulletproof – if you look after the cycle parts and routine maintenance it'll never let you down. 'Early Japanese electrics weren't the best – you have to pull all the connectors apart every couple of years and spray them with dielectric grease to prevent any problems. But if you do that, it'll go on forever.'

Limited edition, bulletproof, and a steal at £1300 (and the white wheels are ace)



'The VFR800 is bulletproof – it'll never let you down'

## 1984 GL1200 Aspencade 173,000 miles

Ray Brooking, 68, builder from London

I got my first Wing in 1981 and haven't looked back. I got this one in 1988 when it had done 4000 miles. That's when I joined the Gold Wing Owners Club of Great Britain, racking up the miles going to events all over the world. 'Like most Gold Wings the alternators give up, which is a pain as you have to take the engine out to get to them. I had three alternators go in five years. Then I saw a guy who did kits to fit a car alternator – it went on the side under the fairing and runs off a belt from the crank. I got one from a Suzuki Swift – it's been on there for eight years. 'The only other problem – again common on Wings – is the right head gasket went in Switzerland at about 140,000 miles. Luckily we were only a few miles from our campsite so got it transported there and I fixed it – I always carry a spare with me. Other things I carry are levers, a clutch slave cylinder (the seals go and you lose the clutch completely), a fuel pump and a CDI unit just in case. It all fits in a pannier. 'My wife and I used to do a lot of touring through Europe with a trailer – pulling it up mountains a lot of the time – and the Hy-Vo [primary] chain got loose at 110,000. At the time it was cheaper to replace the engine than pull it apart, so it's now on engine #2. But it's a great bike. We're off to Skegness on it soon for another Gold Wing event.'



Even more impressive in analogue form



The 1200 easily carries everything – probably a kitchen sink in there

Sion touring the Pyrenees in 2017, grin as bright as his lid



## 1998 VFR800Fi, 104,000 miles

Sion Owen, 56, engineer from Hinckley

I bought this new as a parallel import in 1998. I've been to Nordkapp [in the north of Norway], round Europe, done the North Coast 500, ridden round Ireland – lots of it two-up with my wife before the kids arrived. 'I've never had the heads off or been into the gearbox – it's just been a case of servicing it and replacing parts as they wear. It's had two sets of fork stanchions because of rust, one stator, two rectifiers, the shock has been rebuilt three times and I fitted K-Tech front springs. I replaced the cracked original downpipes with a Motad stainless system,

the leaky coolant pipes were replaced with silicone ones and it's had a new radiator pressure cap and cooling fan. 'Over the years it's had three valve clearance checks – the first one had no adjustments, the second one there were a couple of shims that needed changing, and the last one the clearances had closed down a bit on one cylinder. It's still on the original clutch and front wheel bearings, and I've only just replaced the front discs – they lasted 100,000 miles. 'When it got to about 60,000 miles I did consider selling it because I wondered if it was going to become unreliable. But to get anything better I'd have to spend a lot of money. And for road riding it's pretty much as fast as anything, you just have to work it a bit harder.' *Bike*

That moment you tried to get a pic at 100,000 and missed it