

THE PHIL IRVING STORY

BACKGROUND PICTURE OF "MOTOR CYCLING'S" TECHNICAL CONTRIBUTOR WHO RETURNS TO OUR COLUMNS AFTER A DECADE'S ABSENCE.



PROBABLY the best-known writer on motorcycling technicalities—a reputation earned through long experience as a designer, engineer and rider—Philip Edward Irving, M.I.Mech.E., M.S.A.E., M.I.P.E., was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1903. He was educated at Wesley College and the Royal Melbourne Technical College and his professional career began as an engine designer with Crankless Engines, Ltd.

Irving's interest in motorcycles dates first from the acquisition of a s.v. A.J.S., followed by one of the famous "Big Port" A.J.S. models which he used extensively for trials and racing. Between the years 1925 and 1930 Irving built up a reputation as a competition rider, winning not only the Victorian Solo Reliability Championship but also the Australian 600 c.c. and Victorian 350 c.c. sidecar track championships in 1928. Two years later in company with Jack Gill, driving a Vincent-H.R.D. single-cylinder sidecar outfit, Irving came to England via New Zealand and Canada, arriving just after the T.T.

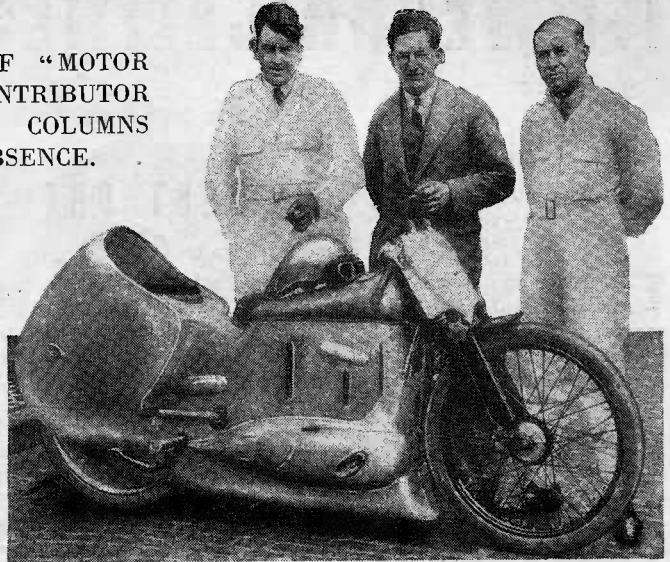
Irving's repute had preceded him and he had no difficulty in obtaining a post in the Velocette factory drawing office. But his individuality asserted itself and he left to join forces with Arthur ("Digger") Simcock and Alan Bruce to build up a supercharged Brough Superior-J.A.P.-powered outfit to attack the World's Fastest solo and sidecar records. This team was among the first to appreciate the advantages of streamlining and complete enclosure of a machine designed for sheer speed and the Brough Superior illustrates the advanced thinking of Irving and his colleagues. Although a piston seizure robbed Simcock of the solo record, Alan Bruce secured the sidecar record at a speed of 124 m.p.h. on April 30, 1932.

Meanwhile, Irving had joined the Vincent-H.R.D. factory as chief designer with the primary job of developing a new frame which Phil Vincent had already tried experimentally. The frame finally produced formed that which appeared in the 1932 model and which remained unchanged until 1939. Irving's subsequent contribution to the Vincent programme was the enclosed, water-cooled J.A.P. and Villiers-engined model W, quickly followed by the "Meteor" and "Comet" high-camshaft "singles" which were both designed, developed and built in under four months. The machine which immediately springs to the enthusiast's mind when the name "Vincent" is mentioned is the Series A "Rapide"—a "thousand" twin—which was Irving-designed.

It was in 1932 that Irving began writing on technical subjects for *Motor Cycling* and six years later "Slide Rule"—the nom de plume under which his work largely appeared, including several books—was coined.

In 1937 Irving returned to the Velocette

Irving (centre) with fellow Australians Arthur Simcock (right) and Alan Bruce. This trio were responsible for the Brough Superior, "Leaping Lena," on which Bruce secured the World's Fastest sidecar record in 1932. That year Irving began writing for us.



factory where he took a hand in the planning of a 250 c.c. s.v., of which only two were made, and then designed the 600 c.c. geared-twin-crankshaft Model O which was never put into production either but which incorporated the adjustable rear suspension system and stressed-steel rear frame which is used today by the Velocette concern. Irving was injured during the bombing of 1940 and it was about this period when he roughed out the original conception of the LE model although, as he admits, this was later drastically redesigned so far as engine and transmission were concerned. Irving remained at Hall Green on war production until 1942 when he transferred to the A.J.S. factory at Woolwich where, after a short period in developing machines for military purposes, he assisted the late Joe Craig in the design of the twin-cylinder racing "Porcupine" engine, originally intended purely for super-

charging. Before the first engine was completed however, Irving was posted, under Government orders, back to the Vincent factory where he was engaged to develop a special engine for airborne lifeboats.

The Irving story came into the ken of post-war peace-time motorcycling when he designed the Series B Vincent "Rapide" with its renowned variants, the "Black Lightning" and "Black Shadow" and the later version of the single-cylinder "Comet."

Family reasons demanded a return to Australia where Irving applied his genius to helping to build up the economy of his own country's industry by designing a six-litre twin diesel tractor engine and, by contrast, a high-performance car cylinder head.

Ten years later Irving found it possible to visit England again, this time just before the T.T., and his first action was to resume his technical writings exclusively for *Motor Cycling*.—C. P. READ.

When chief technician of Vincent's Irving produced a 998 c.c. engine intended by the Stevenage concern for the Indian factory in U.S.A. He is seen aboard a Hendee-built "Chief" powered by one of these units.

