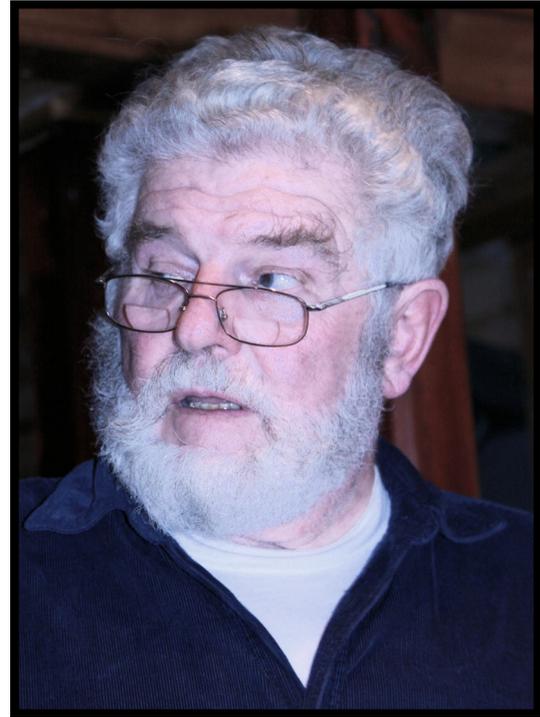


Mike Johnson
1941 to 2014
A Sporting Tribute to a good friend:
by John Taylor.

With Mike Johnson's passing on the 21st of December, long distance road record breaking and time-trialing lost one of its staunchest supporters, at the age of 73.

It was about a year ago that Mike told me he wouldn't make it to another RRA committee meeting in London, and I realised then just how serious his breathing and heart problems had become, causing him to pause and rest a few times on the short walk back to Euston Station. We sat and had a cup of coffee while waiting for his train and he told me the doctors had also discovered he'd got terminal prostate cancer, and were doing tests to see if the cancer had spread into his bones. A few weeks later came the bad news that it had spread, and he'd got between six and nine months to live.



Liz and I met up with Mike and Yvonne at Stone, after he'd motored there in his 1930's vintage Riley with his two dogs in the 'dicky' seat. He looked tired and drawn from the effects of his medication and treatment, but at least we were able to have a chat and something to eat. That proved to be one of Mike's last outings, and our final visit with Lynne was to his cottage at Wrenbury, knowing that it would be for the last time. I had a couple of short conversations on the phone with him after that, but by December he'd faded badly enough to enter a hospice at Winslow where he ended his days.

I know nothing much of Mike's earlier life, except for the fact that living on the A49 at Newton-le-Willows meant he was able to see all of the Land's End to John o'Groats record breakers and their helpers, as they stopped at his father's house for rest and sustenance on their long way north. Mike sometimes had to sleep on the settee so that a tired rider could have his bed, and those images and memories must have captured his imagination, as he missed only three 'End to Enders,' going through in all his days. His father Phil's love of tandems inspired Mike to commission a trophy in his memory, which is presented to the fastest tandem pair in the Mersey Roads 24Hour every year. After finding his boater hat on the shelf, Yvonne reminded me that Mike had been invited to join the famous 'Pickwick Club' in later years, his character being 'Bill Stumps', she continued by saying that Mike's father would have been so proud of him.

With his partner Yvonne, Mike played a huge supporting role for many years during the Mersey Roads 24hr time trial, keeping the riders and helpers fed and watered from dusk to dawn, and then helping them again on the finishing circuit. Mike's ribald quips to riders as they overstayed their time at the sit-down feed, or as they wearily rode past him, were legendary. "On your way now, this isn't a hotel" and "you're riding like a pregnant kangaroo!" were two favourite sayings, and Lynne laughs every time she remembers him shouting - "Come on lass, I'll let the dogs loose if you don't go a bit faster!"

Trike and tandem trike riding was Mike's passion, racing at all distances, but preferring the longer events, and in 1992 with Richard Hills, who went on to be a life-long friend, he rode 376.8m in the Mersey Roads '24.' RRA official duties as an Observer and a committee member also kept Mike busy from the year 2000 onwards, with many records attempted and broken. As well as observing, he was also a great help and support to me during Lynne's two 'End to Ends' and 1,000mile record, guiding us through various towns and cities on route, he even ran alongside Lynne on Berriedale, something I was too tired to do, and he also showed amazing stamina during the 1000m, probably a legacy of his lorry driving skills.

In 2006 he took the job of Chairman on the RRA committee, a post he served well, and held until a few months ago.

Mike had a varied and busy working life, spending many years at sea with the Merchant Navy. He then turned his hand to driving lorries, taking his trike in the cab on his longer trips so that he could keep fit. He was a strong Trade Union man for many years, and that is where he honed his committee and chairmanship skills, making him a useful member of the many associations and societies he belonged to and served in later life. Another of his passions was canals, turning that passion into a living by working first of all as a lock-keeper, a water bailiff, and then moving barges and boats for their owners, up and down the country's waterways and canals.

He was interested in most forms of transport, the history in particular, and the engines and motors that propelled trains, heavy vehicles and machinery. Steam, diesel and old petrol engines were his favourites, and when I first knew him he had a massive steam-roller parked on the drive at his home in Burland.

Mike had a tough, brusque outward appearance, but then he was an ex-rugger player, with many scars to prove it. Road record breakers Andy Wilkinson, Ralph Dadswell, and Lynne Biddulph *nee* Taylor all benefited from Mike's support and words of wisdom over the years, and Lynne said you soon get to realise that under his tough exterior lay a soft heart of gold. She built a good rapport with Mike and Yvonne during her many 24 hour races, and with his large, bushy white beard, she nicknamed him Teddy Bear during her first solo 'End to End' record in 2001.

He shunned the limelight and formal functions whenever he could, but he was always the first to heap praise and congratulations on those who had given their all to break a long distance record. During an RRA Triennial luncheon at Hatfield, Mike admitted to Eileen Sheridan that as a lad, he'd paid more attention to the huge Pickfords low-loader lorry transporting her caravan, than to cheering her on. The lorry was parked outside his house while the helpers took a rest break and a meal during her 'End to End' in 1954. At that same function he also met up with Syd Parker, the 'stoker' on the first tandem trike 'End to End' in 1949. As a young lad, Mike had been turfed out of his bed for Syd to have a sleep.

Mike was a most generous man, who gave many hours of his time for a cause, often supplying his car full of fuel for a record attempt. He lived long enough to follow Jane Moore's successful trike 'End to End' by phone contact, and even got to meet her a few days later when she called in to see him. In recent weeks and months Mike's had regular contact and company with his many friends, especially his old tandem trike partner Richard Hills who devoted many long hours to sit with him, and to support Yvonne.

Mike had been a widower for seventeen years since the death of his wife Janet. He leaves a son Morgan, and Yvonne, a loving partner and companion who has looked after and cared for Mike, whilst not forgetting his faithful dogs Paddy and Roamer.

Thank you Mike for all your help and support over the years, you will be greatly missed by all of us.