



Chinon is on

A new addition to the European classic motorcycling calendar? The Tours Commemorative MotoGP in Chinon at the end of June makes its case.

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The Tours Commemorative GP at Chinon? Well, to cut a long story short, it's all down to trams! The old city centre circuit at Tours was fine – until the lines of a new tramway twice bisected it. Even that wouldn't have been a problem if the city fathers had agreed, for just one day a year, to truncate the line to allow the circuit to operate unimpeded. But no. It was decreed that on the arrival of each tram, racing must cease, barriers be placed across the track and everyone be patient until the tram had passed.

After two years of that, and with no sign of compromise from the authorities, the organisers had had enough and moved the whole event 50 kilometres south-west to the ancient town of Chinon.

1: The 1951 BSA special of Fabrice Ouvrard takes the racing line around the place Jeanne d'Arc hairpin bend.

2: DD and Annick Bourhis making haste along the rue du 11 Novembre 1918 straight on their favoured mount, the 1929 Alcyon 350 Sport sidecar combination.

3: The 'leader of the pack', Christophe Pasquier, waits on his 1935 Norton Model 18 to lead the competitors on to the circuit for the first morning session.

Tours' loss is Chinon's gain. The new venue offers a longer, wider 1.2km street circuit, going out along the banks of the River Vienne and returning through the streets of the new town, below the medieval castle, once home to the English King Henry II. Under the shade of the riverside plane trees, a more spacious paddock allows the competing historic and classic motorcycles to be better displayed, as well as creating space for club, marque and trade stands. But the acid test is what do the people think – and that is 'ça va bien'!

The new circuit and location evidently is popular with riders as well. With over 80 entrants, that more than doubled the number at Tours last year. And for the first time, the event attracted prewar machines – largely thanks to the Bourhis and the Boucq families respectively bringing examples from their private



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4: Jerome Bourasseau powers his 1934 Nimbus four sidecar combination along the start of the paddock straight.

5: The Bourhis family 1929 Alcyon 350 Sport 'Oiseau Bleu' on display in the paddock.

6: The 1928 Monet et Goyon T175 of the Boucq family collection on display in the paddock.



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restored 1929 350 Sport Oiseau Bleu, along with their beloved 1929 350cc AJ Sport sidecar combination, in which they produced an animated performance on the circuit.

Alongside them were Philippe and Katia Boucq, the custodians of probably an even larger collection of Monet et Goyon machines – although they brought with them just three of those – Philippe riding his 1925 ZS3 (which was, as the French say, 'dans son jus' – or so lightly restored as to look every one of its 91 years), Katia riding her 1951 S6V and their 1928 Model T 175 was on display.

The Bourhis' and the Boucqs' machines were not the only prewar representatives on the track. Jerome Bourasseau and passenger produced a spirited display on his 1934 750cc Nimbus sidecar combination. But despite being the product of Denmark's sole motorcycle manufacturer, it was only one of two Nimbuses competing at Chinon.

However, easily fastest of the prewar machines was the 1935 Norton Model 18 of the iconic Christophe Pasquier, monsieur favoris volants – or the man with the flying whiskers!

Whether at Tours or Chinon, this event always attracts aficionados of the British motorcycle, and 2016 was no exception. What's more, it generates intense inter and intra marque competitiveness.

Among the Nortons competing, Christophe Pasquier didn't have it all his own way. The 850 Commandos of Régis Gauthier and Jean-Claude Simon seemed to appreciate the long straights of the circuit.

Triumphs were numerous at Chinon. Eric Innocenti showed a mastery of the circuit on his 1970 TR6 Trophy. In the spirit of triumphant competition, Jean-Yves le Mesle's T120 Bonneville was a close and constant companion to his rear wheel!

Of the British 'big three', BSA is held in particular regard in France. Jean Hougron performed impressively on his 1973 B50, although in the BSA challenge he could offer little to the 1973 Rocket three of Jean-Yves le Mesle.

Canvassing views of those on and beside the track, the consensus was that this event's relocation to Chinon is the making of it. Riders were universally positive about the new circuit – even allowing for the inevitable wish for fewer chicanes, full safety barrier protection and higher speeds – and they created a spectacle widely appreciated by the spectators. But perhaps more important still is that the event is attracting older vehicles. Hopefully the trend will continue and make Chinon a major event on the European historic and classic calendar.

End

collections of Alcyons and Monet et Goyons.

As ever, British manufacturers were well represented, amounting to a quarter of the entrants. From Europe, there were many BMWs – unsurprisingly as the event celebrated the company's centenary – along with two prewar Nimbuses and a fine selection of Laverdas, MV Agustas, Moto Guzzis plus, being the personal preference of the organiser, Christian Hervet, numerous Ducatis.

From the start, opposite le Jardin Anglais, the circuit runs straight, parallel to the river, for about 600m before a gentle right bend leads into a hairpin left. From here the course rises over the next 200m to a right angle bend opposite the railway station. Rounding this leads onto the home straight, which eases left in its closing stages, followed by another hairpin left which takes the riders across the finish and on to their next lap. The temptation to open the throttle wide, on the long straights, is suppressed by eight chicanes along the length of the course. But as the circuit is delineated only by crowd barriers, save for straw bales at the home hairpin, maybe that's no bad thing.

Between track sessions the paddock drew large crowds, keen on scrutinising an interesting array of motorcycles spanning some 80 years. The club stands produced a degree of partisanship – although this might be described as friendly rivalry! Always keen to promote the Alcyon marque, Annick and Désiré Bourhis exhibited a 1925 two-stroke 175cc Type 'O' Sport, a 1927 250cc Super Sport and an exquisitely