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jetset

the official magazine of

Lambretta club
GREAT BRITAIN





A Citizen of the world has passed away

To many members of the LCGB, the name Cesare Battaglini is relatively unknown. We all love Lambrettas but differences in language and culture mean we don't always get the chance to know as much as we might about the exploits and achievements of overseas scooterists. Yet Cesare – who passed away recently – was without doubt the most pre-eminent Lambretta rider of the post-war era. Nic Cicutti explains his impact.

Buried deep in the many trillions of useless internet pages published today is a website that celebrates the activities of scooterists in the 1950s and 1960s, many of whom journeyed thousands of miles around Europe, the USA and Asia out of a sheer sense of adventure.

Back then, riding a scooter over a long distance wasn't like it is today. Roads were often barely more than dirt tracks, riders would simply camp out for weeks or months at a time in jungles, deserts and on mountain sides. If you broke down, spare parts were rarely available, you either fixed your bike with whatever was to hand or you gave up and went home. To their credit, scores of young men and women from many countries went round the world on their Lambrettas (and Vespas, it must be said).

Among the names on the website list is Tony Hutt, from London, who in 1958 rode with his friend Graham Rex from the UK to Australia, crossing Finland, the former Soviet Union, Iran, Pakistan and India – and spending less than £1 a day on their

journey. Other UK and foreign riders also rate a mention.

But by far the most famous long-distance rider of all was Cesare Battaglini. In 1954, riding a Model D 150, Cesare rode from Barcelona to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and back to Italy, a journey of about 20,000 miles, which he completed in April 1955.

No sooner had he returned home than he was already preparing his second trip, this time round the world, again on a Model D. But in his case it wasn't to be just a "simple" journey following a line around a pre-set course: he set himself the task of visiting every continent in the world and as many countries as possible along the way.

This time, his trip was to last far longer – over three years from July 1956 to September 1959 – travelling 100,000 miles across Europe, Egypt, Africa, Indochina, Indonesia, China, Australia, New Caledonia, the Himalayas and India from north to south, New Zealand, the Polynesian Islands, North and South America and finally back to Italy.

In the course of his travels he was chased by elks in the Arctic Circle, found his road in India blocked by a huge python which he frightened off by rewing up his Lammie's exhaust, ended up among a group of armed bandits in Baluchistan and only escaped by riding across-country. His rear shock snapped midway through the African desert, but he carried on after a makeshift repair.

When he returned, thousands of Italians turned out to greet him as a hero. His travels and his success not only made him famous, they gave Innocenti with a fantastic marketing opportunity which the company duly took advantage of.

Yet Battaglini himself was not remotely interested in fame or fortune, but adventure. Before setting off on the second trip, he wrote: "I dream open-eyed about strange peoples, of unexplored

forests and savage mountains, of never-ending deserts and a thousand other things that don't simply exist as figments of my imagination but which are realities of the world we live in. What torments me is that the knowledge that even though all these things exist, maybe I won't ever see them with my own eyes." In the end, of course, he did.

Having come back after virtually five years on a Lambretta around the world, it would have been easy for Battaglini to fade back into obscurity, to get married, focus on work, forget about Lambrettas and settle down.

In fact, the next 50 years found him just as dedicated to Lambrettas as the first five had been. He carried on riding around Europe and further afield, this time on trips of "just" a few thousand miles at a time. At a time when the Lambretta name risked being forgotten even in Italy, he helped found the World Lambretta Club and travelled all over their country to help support up local clubs throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Among the thousands of people who have attended Euro Lambrettas over the years, Cesare Battaglini was a regular,

attending every one from Strasburg in 1989 to the last one in Ireland in June last year, even though he was already unwell.

Most times he continued riding to each event, either on a Model D or a Series 2. His first Irish Euro to Millstreet in 1998, for instance, involved a 2,700-mile round trip. Not bad for someone who was already 70 years old. By the time he was in his 80s, he would fly to the rally or go by van with his scooter in the back, but still take part in the ride-out. He might cut a slightly shambolic "mad professor" figure at times but his kindness and willingness to talk to anyone, young or old were legendary.

Cesare Battaglini finally passed away on 3rd October last year. His funeral was attended by many, many hundreds of Lambretta enthusiasts from around the world – not surprising to those who knew him. After all, when asked once about his nationality, he said: "I am proud of being Italian, but I really consider myself to be a citizen of the world".

He will be missed by all who knew him. Our condolences go to his comrades in the Lambretta Club of Emilia Romagna, of whom he was the president, and to his family.

