

The Very Thing That Happens

By Kenn Hartmann

'The Wild One' may be the granddad of biker flicks; but the great-granddaddy-o just might be 'No Limit' filmed on location at the 1935 Isle of Man TT races. Check it out on You-Tube. Filmed midway between the Great Depression and the second Great War, the race scene climaxes with period effects and primo-stunt riding. George Formby stars as a wild one of his generation; he plays ukulele and rides Nortons. Unlike Marlon, George gets the girl in his role as chimney sweep with a speed fetish. Elements of both films appear in the 60's Rocker verse Mod phenomenon. An ethos of adolescents weaned on apocalyptic decadence, their painted skulls detonated incendiary ideas about motor-bikes. The unholy spawn of mid-century urban angst. The by-gone conflict clashed in music and style. Mods thrived in Piccadilly Circus scene, fashionable faces, purple threads and blue beanies. Rockers loitered at petrol juke joints and Lorry stops around London. Places like Ace Café on North Circular Road and 59 Club – a spiritual outreach.

At Ace Café, Rockers dropped a coin into the slot and raced to and fro before end of song. Doing a magical 100mph got tagged 'doing the ton.' In 1970, a skiffle band called Mungo Jerry sang 'do a ton or ton and 25.' In Chicago, the ton is done a few places around town. On Lake Shore Drive, it's frowned upon. One guy got busted recently for doing 2-ton. I witnessed but refused to testify when my dad got a ticket in front of the Palmolive Building, pre-Playboy Club timeframe. Southbound, into town, Chicago's navigational beacon beat time to a swirling cop cherry, dark Lake Michigan, surreally electrastic. Imagine a Grand Prix on LSD. If not there, how about Roosevelt Road in Cicero? Ok, like after midnight on the Ike.

Last year, when the Ton-Up Club of Chicago presented 'Mods vs Rockers Vintage Motorcycle & Scooter Show' at Delilah's on Lincoln, a thousand bikes showed. I thought what the hell? Back in the 80's, the Lincoln blues clubs rarely let bikes out front because it frightened foreign tourists taxied in by shills for North-side clubs. So I moved next door to a dive called Cassidy's. One night, the manager's girlfriend's brother drove into my sickle. The manager agreed to pay for parts. I wheeled the damaged Sporty into the bar and parked it on stage for a 2-day stint of wrenching entertainment. I dawdled an extra day – the manager's generous drinks and other illicit condiments offered scant incentive to hurry. The regulars remained ambivalent. They came and went and when it fired, out the door I went, thinking 'f*ck Lincoln Ave.'

The Ton-Up boys have brought bikes back to the avenue so I blow my trumpet loud and proud up and down Lincoln. Then stop to party, Ton-Up style at 'Return of the Hell Riders' at Delilah's. I think Rocker's short for Rockafied and Mod means Modificate. All about bikes and beer. Everything else is freeform, illustrious cool shit that pays homage to monster motorcycles - not Discovery TV but Frankenstein with a but in his toothy

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