

"THREE PEAKS" THE '1965' RACE - AS ONE COMPETITOR REMEMBERS IT.

At 9.15.a.m. on race day morning, the sun is already blazing down from an azure sky. The moors at Ribbleshead are bone dry. One more worry now adds itself to an already jittery pre-race mind, continually wondering "Can I cope with the early pace? Will I blow-up on Whernside?" Now the theme is "Will the sun tire me?" The dry course suits the speed merchants and the perfect visibility leaves them no navigational problems. Spirits sag inevitably.

Ten fifteen finds me warning-up with old campaigner Dave Hodgson. He certainly believes in being thorough - we've already made four circuits of the large pasture. By now I've raised a light sweat and begin to feel ready for the off.

At the gun I sprint for the top of the slope only to find Peter Hall and David Spencer already ahead of me through the gate. I settle for third berth as far as the limestone crags, once across that we become a quintet as Dave Hodgson and Derick Lawson join us: Peter leads the way across the dry tussock grass. Crossing the long wall beyond Wife Hole, Dave veers off to the right whilst the four of us spearhead the main field in a direct line for Swine Tail. The gradient is easy but the long tussocky moorland makes it heavy work. Peter and David alternate in the lead: I hold them despite walking the steeper inclines. We negotiate the network of gullies forming Humphrey Bottom and turn towards the base of Ingleborough.

There is no holding David; scrambling up the stream bed he forces his way to the front. I follow, nose a few inches from his heels and Peter panting at my rear. The suicidal pace married to the warm enervating sunshine worry me - already my vest is soaked in sweat. With the devil in him, David forges away up Swine Tail. Peter pulls past me, remarking scornfully, "Let him go, he'll blow up" But none-the-less giving chase: unwilling to be left out of it, I tag Peter. We emerge onto the flat Ingleborough Plateau and a cooling breeze. The ebullient David hurtles past us on his way down. We clear the roped check point area and Peter gives chase. Now the field is well strung out and we slip cautiously down amongst crag and climbing competitors, onto soft grass, once more and then drop down to the spongy peat hags.

Peter pursues David on a slightly higher course to my left; I tackle the gullies, boggy patches and occasional rock of Gaping Ghyll Beck Head. It is awkward and requires total concentration to stay upright. The merciless sun tires me, I'm losing ground so that the wooden steps of the Clapham fell wall come none too soon. Scrambling over I switch right, down the steep slope and take a direct line towards Sulber Bottom. It is a gamble but I'm lucky. The normally soggy peat is firm and the crossing easy. By the high limestone wall, at the head of Sulber, I've overhauled the Barrow speedsters.

The sun continues to grill me; my energies evaporate. Leaden feet rebel at chasing the flying Lancastrians. "I am so tired" I tell myself "and there are sixteen miles to go!"

Expecting to be overtaken at any moment I dare not look behind. Spirits sink further as the receding pair slip from view over the "Nick" I plod on, forcing flagging legs along the easy running of Sulber Bottom until I too make the 'Nick'. Scrambling down through the limestone crag I catch sight of Peter and David a field ahead. Here the easy going through Beecroft Farm gives me new heart to tackle the slope vigorously. At the crest I momentarily lose the falagged diversion in the welter of onlookers. I plummet down under the railway, brake sharply and end up abruptly on the Horton road.

Friends give me a cheer but as they tell me later "You looked Green" which colour exactly matched my feeling at this moment. More words of encouragement from spectators all the way to the Crown and my tormentor relents - the sky clouds over. The deceptively steep green lane makes my knees buckle and my attempt to gulp down poffered tea ends in a spluttering gasp, so I leave it. The leaders stride away up the green lane as I slip



THE '1965' RACE - AS ONE COMPETITOR REMEMBERS IT. .....continued.....

right into the field leading to Brant Gill Head. I have company in the shape of Dave Hodgson, last seen before Ingleborough! We clear Brant Gill copse bringing us level with Peter and David coming from our left, so a useful piece of route finding pays off again.

Over the second walled green lane we freewheel down a grassed slope, scramble across a broken wall, change gear for the grinding, stamina sapping, lung bursting jog up Linckiln Pastures and we're heading for Pen-y-ghent. Derick Lawson catches us as we tackle the successive grass rises. So we are again all square as at one mile! Peter chats to Dave Hodgson but a look behind at the chasing field warns me that we must get moving. David Spencer has similar ideas. He makes another break. He is in such fine fettle that despite some hard graft I am left fifty yards behind. Perhaps the cooling breeze has invigorated him, it certainly suits me. I manage to jog most of the wet moorland approach to Penyghent, cutting into David's lead. We scramble up the 'chute' between the gritstone buttresses and the gap shrinks but once on the grassy top, David jogs purposefully towards the marshals. He shoots off to the north on the long curving descent and the gap widens again. Content not to overdo things at the half-way stage, I throttle back and coast down to Hull Pot Beck, slowly hauling David in. Not to be outdone, Peter has 'bombed' down behind us. A quick backward glance confirms he's just a stone's throw away.

Now we enter the "graveyard", that belt of undulating, boggy stamina sapping, drumlin country where so many competitors hopes have been slowly drained out of them as they squelch and stumble towards distant Whernside. "Never mind your foes, just get across this lot and don't go in", I tell myself. David stays just ahead as we negotiate walls, avoid bright green patches and seek a practicable route. He is wilting. We sweep down off the heathery drumlins and once on the limestone grassland I apply pressure and momentarily take the lead for the first time.

"It's great, I'm getting away. But No!" Rasping breathing and thudding footsteps spell a new challenge. Yes, it is Peter Hall again! My pace feels right so I hold it. I gain slightly at each wall only for Peter to press ahead on the running in between. We reach Old Ing gate together and clear the little stream. Two fields later, Peter gasps, "Is this the best route?" "Don't know is my non-committal mutter: Glancing across I note his ashen face: "He is suffering as well" I think, "or is he?" Just then as Nether Lodge farm appears in a fold in the ground, Peter spurts away. I cannot respond. He may look whacked but he seems pretty strong. The cryptic thought crosses my mind "This is my best pace, so if he goes away that's it!"

Peter holds the farmyard gate for me - last time through here we climbed it and got ticked off. Again he spurts off along the white stony farm road. At the next awkward gate I shout "Vault it", but Peter opens it and I just manage to squeeze through as it swings back viciously. Again he races ahead but seems reluctant to commit himself; Can't think why! He falters at Lodge Hall Bridge so we're level again. We swing right to the gate to Gauber Bottom pastures. I flip over it and take the initiative. Peter draws up to my shoulder and our ding-dong struggle continues. I gain at the walls, Peter over the heavy pasture. As he comes abreast for the fourth time I gauge he is struggling. Here is my chance. Striving a little more I open a small lead up the drumlin slope to Gauber Farm. Easing to a walk I take a drink of tea, allowing Peter to get on terms again. We reach the Ribbleshead road together but determined to press home my advantage I push ahead steadily to the road end. Past the cars and knots of supporters, I hear the announcer correcting himself on my finishing position last year, but I really want to know where Peter is right now and I just dare not check back.

Changing to moorland once more is like a kick in the stomach - it breaks up the rhythm but with the gradient in my favour I pick up again on the stony track. Just as well because I am clearly ahead and must push as hard as possible for Whernside. At Gunnerscales I slip through the large gate scattering fowl in all directions, by-pass the farm and head direct for the isolated barn above. My route drops into a marshy bottom from whence the



THE '1965' RACE - AS ONE COMPETITOR REMEMBERS IT. ....continued..

agonising grind to Whernside begins.

Jelly-like legs respond spasmodically to frantic urgings and jog a little but it is mostly walking. Height is being gained steadily but I'm uneasy, I can't see anyone behind. The thought occurs, "Just keep going and you can win" Yet I recall that many a previous leader has run out of strength on Whernside. The tussocky cotton grass, gullied slopes took their toll of his strength as he toiled upwards oking out his reserves and aware of his pursuers closing up. Is this to be my fate? These slopes are so familiar yet at this moment of weariness they seem a never ending expanse of sharply tilted brown stuff, lying between tired me and the summit. Each rise topped reveals yet more of the stuff. Will the broken wall never appear? Up yet another incline; jog an easier section and again an incline but at long last the slope eases off. I reach the haven of stones. Not a soul insight except the group of tiny figures watching from the Olympian heights of Whernside top way above me.

Perhaps the most shattering point in the race this! I've been struggling for ages since passing under Ribbleshead viaduct and I've only just reached the base of the third peak - a 400 foot cliff-face when seen from below after twenty miles of running. With stuttering strides I pick my way between pot holes and peat hags as if in slow motion. My protesting body demands to lie down: somehow I keep pegging away. Soon, hands on knees, I'm moving smoothly up the grass, traversing right on to the loose shale ever upward. I glimpse the check point watchers, they're a little nearer now. I grind away again and soon I'm within nodding distance. Forces spent, I stop in my tracks. I suck in gulps of air, head hanging between knees. Suddenly I see two figures, Peter and Derick Lawson, far below crossing the final level area. This is breather enough! I can't be caught now. A tremendous effort conquers those last forty feet, I haul myself over the top and totter towards the checkers, relishing the friendly encouragement of a local shepherd amongst others. Sharp left turn, build up some speed, flip over the wooden fence and follow the ridge wall. What a relief after the uphill toil! Take care down the three steep drops; now sharp left and control that plunge down to the fell wall above Bruntscar. One foot on and over. How I enjoy freewheeling down that long first field. Careful at the stream! Over the gate and now down the lower field into Bruntscar. I'm glad there's no late challenge my legs feel so weary.

Stepping onto the final roadway is like a sailor coming ashore - I'm all at sea, and the dreaded cattle grids require every ounce of concentration. At the second one a spectator calls "One fortythree and .....record" "What's he on about?" Quite a jolt. Had forgotten all about time, since 10.59.a.m. A walker opens the next gate. My word of thanks stifles on my lips even before I reach the gate. Violent cramp contorts both calves "Oh, no! Not now, Don't stop" I urge myself on. The spasms ease and I'm already dropping down that little dip in the road. Time to gather for the final drive slightly uphill.

Steady! try to keep your form even if your knees are rubbery. The crowds are thickening the clapping lifts me and the final gate beckons. How laboured it all seems. Only a hundred yards now. Phew the bumpy field has me all over the place! Done it! I'm thrilled; incredulous of the record time but mainly pleased to have got round the course. It's been quite a battle. And on such a lovely sunny afternoon.

--ooOoo--