**Tommy Godwin 1920 – 2012**

**The Early Years**

After the First World War Charles Godwin, Tommy’s father, moved his young family from Aston in Birmingham to Connecticut in the USA in search of a better life. Tommy was born there, a brother to sisters Irene and Gladys. The first 12 years of his life were spent on that side of the Atlantic and he was introduced to a way of life where achieving excellence in sports such as running, swimming and baseball was the norm.

In 1932 the family returned to Birmingham and after a brief spell at school he left, age 14, to take up a position as errand boy for a local grocery store called Wrensons and was given his own bike for the first time. One of his customers was a keen cyclist and used to lend him magazines about the sport and so the cycling bug bit him and continental track riders such as Toni Merkens and Arie van Vliet became early heroes and inspirations.

**Getting into Cycling**

In those days many companies would hold their own open sports days, with a mixture of cycling and athletics taking place on a grass track. In 1934 Wrensons held their sports day on the August Bank Holiday and on a borrowed bike Tommy finished 3rd in the one lap race and won stopwatch worth 15 shillings (75 pence).

Shortly after this his father bought him his own sports bike, a Sun Wasp which led to frequent long rides into the country with friends. One early ride was to Symonds Yat and back again in a day starting from Aston Cross at 6:30am and returning home at 8:30pm, a round trip of 134 miles at age 14.

In 1936 he left Wrensons to start work at as an apprentice electrician in the cycle components division of BSA. In those days BSA was a significant company in the cycle trade and supplied parts all over the world.

The BSA sports day on the August Bank Holiday was a big event. Eighty or 90 riders from around the country would come to compete in front of crowds of up to 10,000. Although he didn’t win any prizes, Tommy found competing at that level in these events very exciting and became convinced that that was where his future lay. In 1938 he had his first custom built bike made by a local frame builder, joined the Rovers Racing Cycling Club and took part in his first time trial on the open road at Stonebridge. He won first prize in the handicap section.

Whilst a modern rider can still ride a 10 at Stonebridge he would not be so keen on taking part in the club runs of the day. These were undertaken on 77 inch fixed wheel bikes with no brakes.

**Becoming an Olympian**

The Midlands was a good place to be a cycle racer in the 1930s and 40s. As well as the numerous and lucrative grass track events in the area there were also hard tracks in Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester. Tommy and his father set up a training programme on the road to fit in around his full time job and he took to track racing in all its forms competing in sprints, 1km time trials, pursuits as well as the longer 5 and 10 mile events. The unusual thing was he was good at all distances.

As an electrician Tommy was considered to be in an important trade so was exempt from military service. Despite the difficult times, he continued to train and race and even got married to Eileen in 1944. That was also the year he won his first National title, the NCU 5 mile grass track championship held at Fort Dunlop. He retained it in 1945 at Southall and also got his first international selections to race at Paris and in Denmark. Although in those days, international selection just meant you were given a train and boat ticket to the venue. No mechanic, manager, masseur and often not even a team mate to help out, but Tommy’s ability to get on with the task and his innate friendliness carried him through.

In 1946 Tommy was selected to ride at the World Championships for the first time. It was GB selection policy to choose ‘all-rounders’ for the track squad and then to try and find who was ‘on song’ on the day of a particular event. Not so good for the riders, who often did not know if they were doing a particular event until the morning of the race. So it was that Tommy found himself riding a pursuit for the first time at the World Championships. No wonder the Brits did badly against foreign riders who trained for a specific event.

Selected for the Olympics in 1948, Tommy was put in the four-man team pursuit. But, because of numerous changes in selection, it was a team that had hardly ridden together before. However, despite an indifferent first ride, they qualified for the next round where they improved by 10 seconds to beat the Danes and meet the French in the semi-finals. A further improvement of 3 seconds was not enough to beat the French who won in 4m 54.4s to GB’s 4m 59s. In the ride for bronze against Uruguay the Brits came from behind with a storming ride to record the second fastest time of the series with 4m 55.8s and take the b medal. Tommy was also selected for the kilo event despite not having trained for it. He was also hampered by being one of the last to compete. This meant he was riding on an open-air track late at night in the cold evening air. None the less he recorded a time of 1m 15s which was good enough for the bronze medal and only 1.5s behind the gold.

**After the Olympics**

Tommy continued to compete internationally for a few more years, including being part of the GB team for the Empire Games at Auckland in New Zealand. But by 1956 the pressure of running his cycle shop and a young family made international racing more difficult. However he maintained his interest in the sport by coaching local young riders, keen that they should benefit from his experiences and go on to be better riders.

So successful was he in this new role that he went on to be team manager for the riders at the Commonwealth Games in Perth in 1962. He eventually persuaded the governing body of cycling to appoint a national coach to oversee the development of international standard riders and was the first person in the job. Most notable among the riders he helped at this time was Hugh Porter who went on to win the World Championship rainbow jersey for the individual pursuit and is now often to be heard commentating on cycle racing on TV.

After retirement Tommy kept up his interest in the sport through contact with local cycling clubs, becoming President of the Solihull CC. He was also involved in other good causes through Rotary, which he joined in 1964.

More recently he was very active with the Loughborough Flames project whose motto is “Honour the past but look to the future”. The college was involved designing the torches used at both London Games and the Flames project is concerned with training young leaders to help youngsters develop their knowledge of physical activity and health and to raise awareness of the Olympic values.

*Mike Adams 2014-02-11*

*Based on Tommy’s autobiography and personal archives, kindly made available by his daughter Kay Jones*