

ME & MY BIKE

1959 MATCHLESS G50

NAME: Dave Roper

AGE: 63

HOME: Hicksville, NY

OCCUPATION: Vintage racer and mechanic

T first raced the Isle of Man TT in 1982 on an Aermacchi 350, and returned in '83 racing a Moriwaki Kawasaki and a bevel-drive Ducati. Then we [Team Obsolete owner Rob Iannucci and I] went back to the Isle in August for the first-ever Classic race during the amateur Manx GP, racing Rob's ex-Al Gunter Matchless G50. That event was so successful that they decided to hold a Historic race at the TT in 1984, and we signed up.

"The Historic TT was limited to pre-'72 bikes. There were probably 70 in total, mostly Manxes, G50s, Gold Stars and other British singles. All the big classic racers—guys like

John Cronshaw, Sammy McClements and Geoff Johnson—showed up. It was a *real* race; not a parade. The three-lap race was held early in the evening. The sun was low on the horizon, and on the first lap you could see clouds rolling over the Mountain. On the second lap it started raining. In some places the road was wet, but the sun was shining. Other places it was raining, but the road was dry. Totally confusing conditions.

"Two bikes started every 10 seconds. I left 14th and passed a bunch of people, but didn't really know where I was in the race. On the

last lap people were waving programs at me, and somebody threw up a sign with a "1" on it. I disregarded that—we thought people might give disinformation—but I figured I was doing pretty well.

"They weren't lying, and I became the first American in the event's then-77-year history to win the TT. It was pretty funny; they had to scramble to find the national anthem to play on the podium! I never raced the TT again, though I raced the Manx Classic GP many more times, for the last time in '05. That was a horrendous event: Five very experienced, well-regarded, sober racers got killed that year, one just 10 minutes after I slid off the road at Windy Corner. It affected me. I always really wanted to do it until I didn't want to do it anymore. But it will always be a special place for me. I had some great runs there, and got away with it." **MC**

PHOTO: Tom Riles

