

HOWARD RAYMOND DAVIES

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MANY members will already have heard of the death of Howard Raymond Davies, who died on January 3rd, aged 77.

H.R.D. was born in Wolverhampton, the "home of motor-cycling" on June 25th, 1895. When he finished his school career, he became apprenticed to A.J.S. (at the time a small firm run by five brothers). Then he went to Clynos as a tester before obtaining a similar position with Sunbeams. H.R.D. lost his job with them and moved to the Diamond concern, whose machines were very advanced and very unsuccessful. He was back with Sunbeams in time for the 1914 T.T. and surprised everyone by finishing joint second in the Senior.

With the advent of war, he joined the Army and not surprisingly found it dull. He volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps and while flying over enemy territory was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and taken prisoner. H.R.D. was listed as "missing" and his obituary appeared in Motor Cycling. He was "tickled to death" when he read it, and like Mark Twain before him, who suffered a similar "fate", H.R.D. regarded the news of his death as "grossly exaggerated".

After the war, he resumed his racing career, this time with A.J.S. Riding their new three-fifty in 1921, he set up four world records at Brooklands and became a hot favourite to win the Junior T.T. But a puncture delayed him and he finished second. However, in the Senior he made history by becoming the first man to win on a three-fifty.

His machines let him down during the next three years and so H.R.D. decided to manufacture his own. In 1924 he exhibited his models at Olympia. In 1925 he competed in the Island and came second in the Junior before winning the Senior. In 1927 the incomparable Freddie Dixon rode for H.R.D. and won the Junior.

Yet despite these successes, business suddenly slumped, mainly due to an anti-motor-cycling campaign by the press. H.R.D. went into voluntary liquidation and took a job as a travelling representative for Albion Lorries. He was subsequently employed by Star Cars, Meadows Engines, and the Swallow coachbuilding firm before operating as a manufacturer's agent until he retired last June.

H.R.D. was elected to the Club's roll of honorary members in 1968 and was deeply conscious of the honour. He attended the 21st Annual Dinner in 1969 and I remember feeling overawed when being introduced to him. But his kindly manner soon put one at ease.

We were collaborating on a book about his life and machines but progress was delayed due to the debilitating effect of his long illness, which he fought with typical courage without losing his inimitable sense of humour.

To many of us, H.R.D. personified the spirit of motor-cycling in the 'twenties and with his passing we have lost an irreplaceable link with the vintage era.

Howard Davies and his wife, Maisie, had been married for 50 years. When he died Maisie survived him by only two days and a joint funeral was held for them at the Robin Hood Crematorium, Solihull. They leave two daughters, Pamela and Jean, to whom we send our heartfelt condolences.

Roy Harper.