

Incredible Journey Revisited



LEFT: The original run in 1959 and ABOVE: The old team celebrate their achievement 50 years on by handing over a haggis to David Jordan.

Five former students, who rode a Ransomes Matador mower non-stop from Edinburgh to London's Hyde Park in just four days, got back together recently to commemorate their epic journey.

Back in 1959, Tom Hudson, Mike Smith, Mike Savage, Hugh Tansley and John Wilson, who were students at Hatfield Technical College and former employees of the De Havilland Aircraft Company, wanted to test the reliability of small petrol engines.

So, they hatched a plot to see if they could drive a small petrol-engined mower from Edinburgh to London.

They contacted Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries, and Mark Grimwade was tasked with assisting the students.

The mower was slightly modified with a larger sump added to the 288cc Villiers engine to provide enough lubrication for the non-stop 400 mile trip.

The five left Edinburgh Castle in Easter 1959 with Tom Hudson driving the first leg and the others crammed into a Bedford Dormobile. A haggis was placed in the grass box of the mower to be presented to the Keeper of the Royal Parks in London - a Scotsman - at the end of the journey.

Four days and three nights later they rode into Hyde Park to be met by the Royal Park's staff, Ransomes management, a BBC television crew and the press.

The haggis was handed over and a ceremonial strip of Hyde Park grass was mown.

Fifty years on, Mike Smith contacted Ransomes Jacobsen who readily agreed to support the reunion.

Earlier this summer, the Operation Matador team, all now in their early 70s, arrived at the University of Hertfordshire, with a replica of the Ransomes Matador mower, complete with the original number plate and signage.

They then travelled to Hyde Park, where they re-enacted the completion of their journey by mowing a ceremonial strip of grass and presenting a haggis to the Assistant Parks Manager, David Jordan.

"We are absolutely delighted to be in a position to help the Operation Matador team celebrate their epic achievement of 50 years ago.

"It would be difficult to replicate what they achieved, even today, and it was a remarkable feat," said David Withers, Managing Director of Ransomes Jacobsen.

"It says a lot about the quality of the equipment we built back then; a tradition that we carry on today.

"After 50 years, I'm delighted that all of the team are still with us; that we're still producing quality turf care equipment in Ipswich.

And we're still producing the Matador mower, albeit with some technological enhancements from the original!"