



## HISTORY OF SIGNALLING IN 100 OBJECTS WELBIKE WW2 AIRBORNE MOTOR BIKE



This was a motor bike that was never going to be used by a dispatch rider, let alone the Royal Signals White Helmets motor bike display team! The idea for this bike came from Lt Col John Dolphin, who during WW2 was the CO of the British Secret Military Research Department that was based in Welwyn in North London (hence the name of this bike - Wel + Bike). The requirement had been identified for a small motor bike to make airborne forces more mobile, when they landed on their respective drop zones (DZ). It was built by the British Excelsior Motor Company with a Villiers 98cc air cooled, 2 stroke engine. Its maximum speed was 45MPH with a fuel tank that held 3.7



litres. The estimated range was a maximum of 90 miles (140K) at an average speed of 30MPH. It was designed to be packed into a standard parachute container from which it could be unpacked and made ready in 11 seconds. The main problem of this bike was with the container. As the bike only weighed 32 Kg the container fell to the ground at a different speed to the soldier parachuting. It therefore frequently was separated some distance



from its owner during the drop. Often this was in enemy held territory so it was often captured. The bike had small wheels, only a single brake on the front wheel and was seriously under-powered for cross country use. Airborne soldiers often found it was easier to proceed on foot rather than hunt for the Welbike. However, RAF ground crews used these bikes to ride round their airfields, but as it had only a single brake it was illegal to use it on public roads. Once gliders came into more common use larger, better powered bikes could be delivered with the airborne forces. After 1945 John

Dolphin set up the Corgi Motor Company to manufacture the Corgi motor bike that was derived from the Welbike. Full models of Welbike bikes are rare, so the Royal Signals Museum is fortunate to have one on display to this day, but **not** in the White Helmets section!.