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FRANK WESTWORTH

REVISIONISM

A RECENT CHANCE remark from a guitar-playing maniac and friend made me laugh out loud. But only briefly, because what he'd intended as a joke might not have been. My friend is no motorcyclist, perhaps wisely, but he is one mean guitarist – although I would never admit it – and he knows lots and lots about guitars, which are as varied as are motorcycles, and as increasingly the modern way, they are marketed as much as 'lifestyle' accessories as for serious use by serious musicians. There is – when you look at it – quite a considerable overlap, although I do accept that it's not obvious. My friend considers motorcycles – specifically my own motorcycles – to be loud, ugly and fairly obnoxious devices intended to inflate the ego of the user while being of little benefit to everyone else.

It's hard to argue… although I can, and indeed do, apply much the same descriptions to his guitars.

His off-hand crack the other day was to wonder whether bike manufacturers would at some point offer 'roadworn' new bikes. I'd just posted a picture of a newish toy (a very handsome 1960 Norton M50, thank you for asking) on Facebook and he was laughing at its challenged cosmetics. I had of course retaliated with a definition of 'patina' and its enormous value to some fans of old bikes. He was of course suitably derisive.

'Roadworn'? Fans of Fender guitars will know what this word means, but I accept that not all readers of a magazine intended to be about elderly motorcycles will know Fender guitar lore, so let me explain, briefly. You can buy new Fender guitars. Of course you can. There's a familiar snobbery based around the locations of the plant producing them – although Fender is an American company, it builds guitars in several parts of the world: Japan, Mexico and Korea, to name but three. There are those who consider the Japanese instruments to be better than the American items, and if you spot a parallel between UK and Thai-built Triumphs you get a star.

As well as new, new guitars, you can also pay more money for a 'roadworn' new guitar, which is a new guitar to which someone has applied an angle grinder and several blunt instruments to make it look old – to make it look like it's been around for many years and lived a hard working life on that very road. I can't see the appeal myself, but they sell very well, presumably to players who want to give the impression that they're mean hombres who've seen a whole lot of life in the fast lane. I'm aware of no such trim level for any new motorcycles – not yet – but if you consider the idea for a moment…

That's it. See you out there.

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C=Commando, D=Dominator, L=Lightweight Twin & S= Single

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Bikes in Brum

WORDS & PHOTOS BY RICHARD JONES

THE AUTUMN SHOW season features not one but two events which showcase iconic bikes at the NEC, Birmingham, and few people have the stamina or spending power to attend both.

If you survive the shock of the parking charge and then the admission fees, the cost of a coffee might give your wallet apoplexy. So we've saved you the hassle – here are the highlights from each event...

The Classic Motor Show fills more than one million square feet of five show halls with some 2500 classic cars and bikes. The emphasis is very much towards four-wheelers, but what may have been missing in quantity was more than balanced by two-wheel quality. Some very desirable motorcycles were displayed by the National Motorcycle Museum, VMCC and VJMC, while marque clubs were represented by an eclectic selection of machinery from Norton, BSA, Triumph and Royal Enfield. Other enthusiast organisations added character to proceedings, like the Clifford Arms Classic Bike Club and the amusingly named Awfully Pleasant Scooter Association. To get the best value from your day, you would probably want to wander among the classic cars as well.

EVENT SHOW REPORT

Motorcycle Live, on the other hand, is all about

KICKBACK
Cool custom classics
P22

TRIUMPH TRIDENT
Electric avenue
P28

MORINI 3½
Super Strada
P40

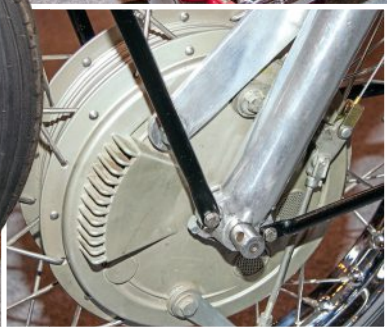
TRIUMPH BOBBER

TRIUMPH LAUNCHED ITS Bonneville Bobber to widespread adulation, describing the bike as a "pure Bonneville hot rod". Although the term 'retro' seems to have been avoided, the machine clearly has its styling antecedents in the late 1930s, reflecting not only Edward Turner's original Speed Twin but also US custom machines from the same period – the 'bob-jobs' that gave rise to the name.

Style is one thing but technology is another and this bike has both in spades. A totally new frame and suspension set-up, a liquid-cooled 1200cc engine with a torque curve specifically designed for this model, electronic ride-by-wire, two riding modes and cleverly concealed catalytic converters. The seat can be adjusted to provide a laid-back cruiser position or a more upright touring look and, with 150 aftermarket accessories available, you can make it whatever you want it to be. So it looks old but is technologically right up there in the 21st century. Is the Bobber neo-retro, vintage retro or, as Triumph describes it, "a genuine factory custom?"

the bikes. New bikes, but many of them dressed up as old bikes. Most of us are familiar with the Latin term 'retro', meaning 'backwards'. There's now a new buzzword on the block; neo-retro. Linking the classical Greek for 'new' with the Latin 'retro' has produced an oxymoron which might mean 'a new imitation of the past'. Yamaha's XSR900 is one such 'neo retro'. To complicate matters further, if a design imitates something older than the recent past, does that make it 'vintage retro'?

Some motorcycle manufacturers use retro and neo-retro models to fill the gap in their ranges between sports bikes and the adventure trail machines. Other companies offer these machines at the cheaper end of the market to entice riders with less disposable income. The crowds at Motorcycle Live didn't seem entirely concerned with what these names might mean. Motorcyclists are individuals who will buy and ride what appeals to them, irrespective of what the marketeers or journalists call it. Just ride it.



NORIEL FOUR

THE NORTON OWNERS' CLUB put on a great show of the marque's machinery.

Alongside the Dominators, a Commando and other assorted exotica there were a couple of specials, one of which was this unusual Noriel 4 which, as the name implies, is a Norton/Ariel hybrid.

Based on the featherbed frame from a 1952 Dominator 88 and the engine from a 1954 Ariel Square 4G Mk2, it's thought to have been first built in about 1959. It was found "languishing in a workshop in 1983, having been unused since 1960".

Over the last 33 years it has been treated to a nut-and-bolt rebuild, which has included lengthening the frame and seat, together with the installation of a handsome Grimeca front brake, a Triumph T140 oil cooler, a Citroën oil filter, a Morgo oil pump and Suzuki levers. The tank colour is Warm Silver, which was used on Mk1 Jaguar E Types and which contrasts pleasingly with the bold red of the wideline frame. Norton's duplex cradle frame was the default solution for special-builders who sought to improve the steering of British touring bikes, although, as you can clearly see, fitting four cylinders into the space intended for a single isn't easy.

In the 1970s, the Healey brothers improved and updated Edward Turner's Square Four design and fitted it into an Egli-type spine frame, perhaps inspired by specials just like this one.

HOLLIS TYPE A

"IF YOU HAVE EVER thought of owning a vintage motorcycle but were put off by the hard work, take a look at the Hollis Type A. We call it 'New Vintage'." So say Hollis Motorcycles, introducing yet another descriptive term for a new/old motorcycle.

You supply an Indian Royal Enfield engine and transmission from a 2000-2008 model, and they carefully transplant it into a chassis and swinging arm crafted by Hollis from T45 aircraft-grade steel, powder-coated. The bodywork is all steel and painted by Bentley Coachworks, while the seat is individually crafted by a gentleman named Glen Moger. The one-into-two ceramic-coated exhaust and handsome girder forks are fabricated in-house, front suspension is provided by a DNM shock absorber and custom spring. As the rear, Canes Creek Öhlins twin shock suspension lurks under the seat. Brakes are from Brembo.

The result, say Hollis, is "conceived as a sunny Sunday morning pub runner". It's undeniably stunning in its execution and needs no label, new vintage or otherwise.

HONDA TURBO

YOU KNOW THAT a motorcycle is special when a rider hangs on to it for more than 32 years. That's how long Paul has owned this CX500 Turbo, purchased when it was just over a year old in January 1984. At the time, there were very few Turbos on the streets or in dealer showrooms. "This one came up and the dealer – Robin Powell Motorcycles – enticed me along to have a look. I drove there on my Gold Wing on my way home from work, and the Turbo was in the window. He let me take it out on trade plates on the Saturday, just to go for a ride on it. I had it all day and I rang him up at half past four to say I'll have it, it's sold!"

The blown CX500 was launched on an unsuspecting world in 1982 and was extremely complex for its time. It featured what was then the world's smallest turbocharger, designed to spin at up to 200,000rpm, and was one of the first production bikes to use computer-controlled fuel injection.

So what's it like to keep maintained these days? "I had to buy a new ignition switch," says Paul, "and I lost a side panel which bounced off. That's about it really, everything else is original. New tyres, new air filter; it's been serviced every year."

Not bad for a 1980s technological marvel which, as Paul says, "turns heads and draws a crowd wherever you go".

MASH TRACKSTAR

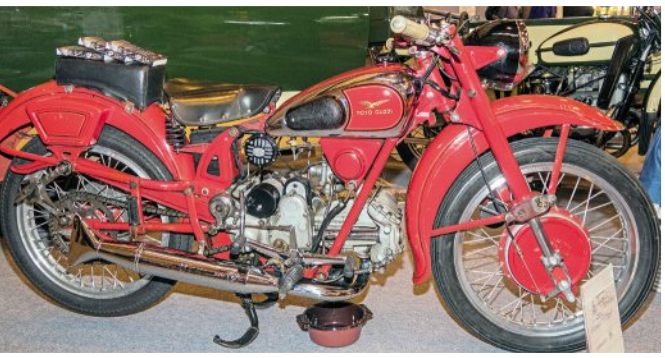
CONCEIVED IN FRANCE by a company named after an American TV show, built in China using an engine that was originally designed in Japan, and styled as a British classic from the 1960s; Mash's Trackstar 400 is certainly a cosmopolitan machine. For £4699 (about the same price as the Royal Enfield Classic Chrome), you get a 398cc sohc engine, which may look familiar because it's based on the unit that powered Honda's XBR500 in the mid-1980s, updated with Delphi electronic fuel injection to make it Euro 4 compliant.

Other technology includes a Bosch ABS system which works with a substantial four-pot disc at the front, while to the rear there is a smaller two-piston stopper. Five gears transmit around 29bhp to a back wheel which, like its partner at the front, has alloy rims. Flat bars, a cockpit fairing, semi-solo saddle, minimal mudguards and peashooter-style silencers give the Trackstar classic café racer cred – and the use of a genuinely old engine design make it more retro than most.

NORTON DOMINATOR

DOES THE NORTON NAME and a parallel twin engine automatically confer a retro label on a modern motorcycle? Or does the use of Öhlins and Brembo components make it a neo-retro? Would the hand-built in Donington, 961cc air- and oil-cooled, two-valve pushrod twin be more retro if it had a featherbed frame, if the engine vibrated and occasional oil leaks were apparent?

Finished in titanium grey, the Dominator comes with all mod cons (electric start, multi-way adjustable suspension, fully floating high-carbon brakes with radial calipers) so that it goes, stops and can negotiate bends with flair and certainty. There are echoes of the old Commando in the engine configuration, but this Dominator is its own machine, as individual as the people who will buy and ride it.



AIRONE SPORT

BACK IN 1990 or thereabouts, this Moto Guzzi was bought by the VMCC... which raffled it as its prize bike. The winner kept it a decade; the next owner became its custodian for a dozen years, then current owner Paul purchased the 1950 Airone TP Sport.

As well as re-chroming the exhaust and levers, fitting new cables and such, Paul also had more serious work to do. "I've had the magneto reconditioned, new chain, checked all the brakes through and a few of the threads in the crankcase were stripped so I've had to put inserts into those."

Despite his best efforts the Airone still isn't entirely reliable, although, to be fair, this machine is well into its seventh decade.

"I've got problems with the clutch at the moment; that's my next job, to sort out the clutch."

The Airone Sport was introduced in 1948 and, in order to justify the 'Sport' badge, its 246cc engine featured a different camshaft to the cooking version, thicker gauge valve springs, a 25mm Dell'Orto carburettor and an increase in compression ratio to 7:1. The machine, with its pressed steel frame, weighed-in at 302lb, so the power increase to 13.5hp at 6000rpm could propel the plot forward at up to 73mph. The cycle parts saw upgrades too, with Borrani rims, 200mm alloy drum brakes, lower and narrower handlebars. It was all topped off with that all-important pad on the rear mudguard to allow the rider to get into a crouched racing position. Bellissimo!

BSA LIGHTNING CLUBMAN

IS THERE A MOMENT when a motorcycle ceases to be a machine and transcends to become a piece of art? If there is, then this BSA A65 Lightning Clubman would be a prime example.

It is practically perfect in every way. It gleams, it shines, the paintwork is polished and even the gaskets, where visible, look like they have been buffed to a fine finish. Some may say patina should be retained to demonstrate a motorcycle's history but the argument for perfection seems equally valid, particularly when it looks this good.

Back in those heady days of the mid-1960s, the Cyclone and Lightning Clubman were marketed for use in production racing. The Lightning Clubman came with dropped bars and rearsets, a siamesed exhaust, a separate headlight, a racing seat and all finished with a metallic gold finish for the tank and side panels. The special spec didn't end with the machine's appearance either – there was a close ratio gearbox and, with a compression ratio of 9:1, the engine produced 51bhp at 6750rpm. This bike was set to take the mantle from the Rocket Gold Star.

Then one year later its road-racing role was assumed by the A65SS Spitfire Mk2 with twin Amal GP carburettors, a 190mm front brake and alloy rims as standard; these being options-only on the Lightning Clubman. So, built for just a single year of production, the A65LC is a comparatively rare bird... and all the more sought-after and valued for that. Perhaps that's why so much care and attention has been lavished on this one: because it deserves it.

KAWASAKI KH500

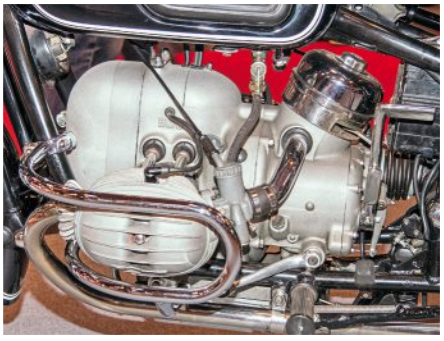
ONE DISPLAY FEATURED bikes whose owners get together at the Clifford Arms at Great Heywood. In between a sparky Bown lightweight and a handsome Moto Guzzi Le Mans 1000 lurked this 1971 Kawasaki H2 triple, spawned back in the days when global warming was only just starting to be seen as a threat to the planet and fuel was relatively cheap at 34p a gallon. This was just as well as the 750cc two-stroke triple could consume petrol at 22mpg. The performance achieved from this titanic thirst was monumental, mind. 60mph could be reached in five seconds, the standing quarter took just over another 7 seconds and the H2's top speed was 120mph or more. All well and good... but the handling couldn't cope. Even the Kawasaki brochure acknowledged this, saying "it's so quick it demands the razor-sharp reactions of an experienced rider. It's a machine you must take seriously".

Time is a great healer and this machine, like many other bad boys from the 1970s, is now looked on with fondness. Modern tyres, bearings and suspension can also calm some of its more unpleasant tendencies. With values of big Kawasaki strokers soaring it'd be a brave owner who pushes it to its limit. And with petrol now well over £5 a gallon, just think of the cost. There are cheaper ways to reach 120mph...

ROYAL ENFIELD CLASSIC

THERE ARE THOSE who argue that Indian Enfields are neither retro nor neo-retro or any such animal. The current 'Classic' model is simply a Royal Enfield. You can trace this machine's lineage back to and beyond the 1950s. The design and appearance aren't being imitated, they're being continued. That being said, the 499cc air-cooled engine has been updated to comply with Euro 4 – there's electronic fuel injection and a digital ignition system.

The engine's 27.2bhp is fed through a wet multi-plate clutch via a five-speed gearbox to the back wheel, which has a disc brake as does its partner up front, with ABS too. 12V electrics power an electric starter which complements the traditional kick start. Weighing 195kg, the Classic doesn't demand Herculean strength to roll it around the garage. What's more, it has a certain timeless style all of its own – perhaps the ideal lightweight classic at £4500?



BMW R50

'STATELY' IS PROBABLY the most appropriate description for this BMW R50/2. You could almost imagine it seated in the House of Lords, resplendent in an ermine robe. The 494cc flat twin looks like it could go on forever, which it probably would, while that double tube steel frame might look more at home as part of a battleship. The four-speed gearbox transmits the engine's 26bhp to the back wheel through BMW's hallmark shaft drive. The elegant 200mm drum brakes can just about bring it all to a considered halt. This is the sort of machine that wafts sedately along. It doesn't deserve to have its throttle wrenched open – nor would that achieve very much. Instead, speed increases gradually to 90mph (although it seems vulgar to mention such a thing).

Riders do have to acclimatise to the rather unusual kickstart which swings out rather than back. The gearbox also requires the rider to become attuned to its foibles. However, devotees insist that the effort is worthwhile, and the rider is transported on journeys of incredible comfort in the certain knowledge that BMW's renowned reliability will ensure an arrival devoid of annoying mechanical problems. This example dates from 1963 and was imported from Holland before being treated to a complete restoration. This included bringing those capacious panniers all the way from the USA, the least that could be done for such a fine motorcycle. CBG

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CBG Winter Classic

About to enter into its sixth year, the Carole Nash Winter Classic event – supported by CBG – has become one of the favourite dates on the show calendar

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JACK HARRISON

IT'S THE SHOW that celebrates all makes, models and eras of the classic scene, and there will once again be an eclectic mix of machines on display in two main halls at Newark Showground for the annual Winter Classic.

A quick look at the clubs set to attend the January 7-8 event gives an idea of the variety visitors can expect, with famed British marques represented alongside Japanese enthusiast groups and off-road and racing organisations – to highlight just a few.

Picking something special out of the line-up is no easy task, but depending on your view there may be a few standouts such as Andy Bolas's Yamaha YSR50, possibly the smallest race rep event built (VJMC), Roger Moss's indecently fast 1934 Scott Flying Squirrel (British Historic Racing) and Bill Dawson's 1950 Velocette Covel built by former race mechanic Hendley Cox (Velocette Owners' Club).

EVENT SHOW PREVIEW

Then of course there's the private entries, which last year produced the event's Best in Show Triumph Hyde Harrier owned by Jeff Elliot. He had meticulously built the bike from scratch with only the frame as a starting point – a project which took him two years – so the standard for this year's hopefuls has certainly been set high.

And while looking at the bikes is surely the most fun part for showgoers, the fact there are hundreds of trade stands packed into the halls and an outdoor marquee means there's just as much time to be spent hunting for the many bargains on offer – whether it be parts, spares, riding kit, memorabilia, cleaning products or even project bikes. CBG

THE BIRCHALL BROTHERS AND SCOOTER WORLD

A CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE show isn't complete without a star guest, and this year is double the fun with sidecar duo Ben and Tom Birchall headlining the event.

The pair will join regular compere Steve Plater on stage for interviews and will cover a range of subjects including their many accomplishments; being former world sidecar champions, four-time TT race winners and the current sidecar TT lap record holders. They will also be available for signing autographs and presenting awards.

And the brothers won't be the only famous names in attendance, as triple British scooter champion Stuart Day headlines the Scooter World hall which has become a hugely popular part of the show. Along with clubs and individuals showing off their scooters, there will be skills challenges, rebuild competitions, a custom show, charity auction and firing-up sessions.

Kickback Olympia

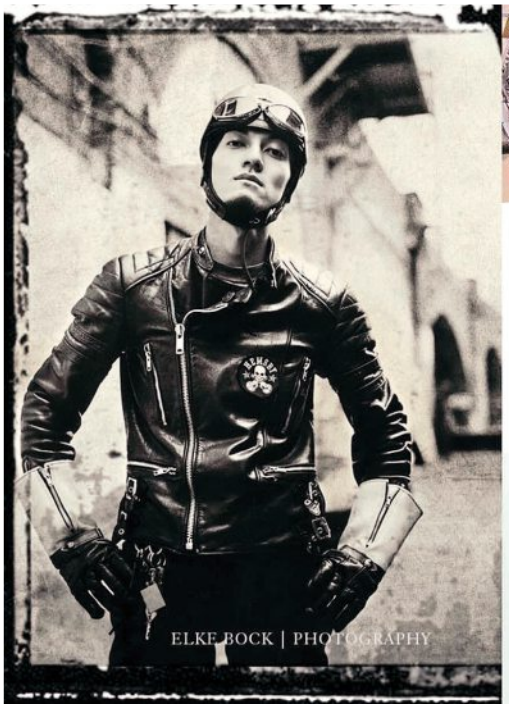
WORDS & PHOTOS BY IEISH GAMAH

EVENT SHOW REPORT

THE NEXT Kickback Show is at Stoneleigh Park on April 1/2. See TheCustomShow.com

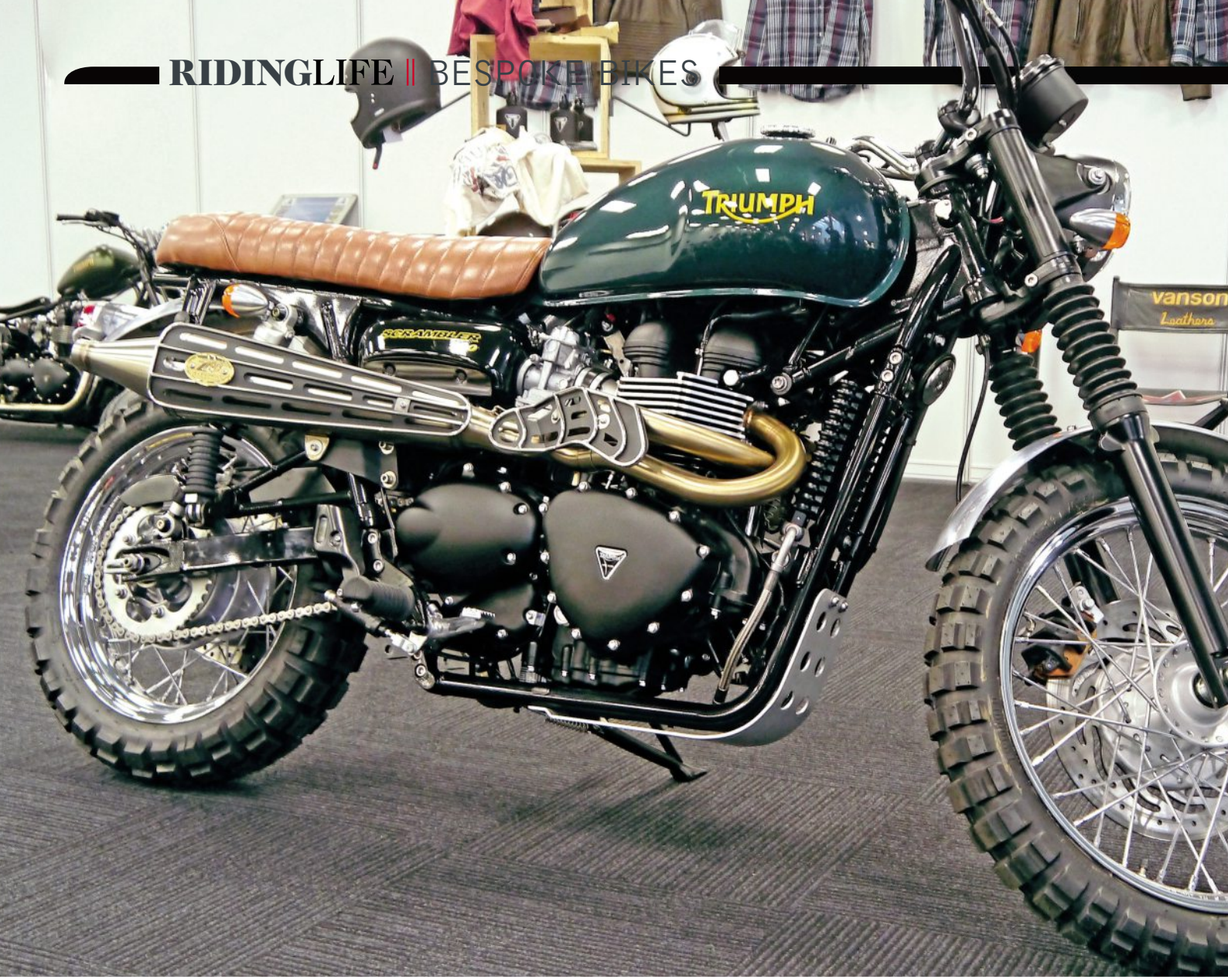
A VAST ARRAY of custom crafted motorcycles were displayed at Kickback London last autumn. Whatever your preference to style, there was something there to catch the eye and boggle the mind. The loft at Olympia Central showcased 60 hand-crafted masterpieces alongside 80 rare classics, customs and dealer specials, while live music and an art gallery helped to keep the 2500 visitors entertained.

One of the nicest aspects of the show was the sheer variety of marques and models used as the starting point for the builds. From a neon-sprayed step-thru to a street-fighting LED-emblazoned



Z1000, the machines were exercises in imagination, individuality and inventiveness on the part of motorcycle enthusiasts, engineers, designers, fabricators, artists and artisans. Many of the motorcycles were clearly the vision of one dedicated builder – some of them individuals who work at home, others long-established dealers.

Here we've highlighted three different approaches to the craft of creating a custom classic. They each go their own way, but share the same motivation of bringing an idea to life, of converting a mental image into an actual motorcycle.



HINCKLEY SPECIALS

THE TRIUMPH MARQUE has always sparked creative thinking, and Hinckley's bikes now inspire a third generation of the Lilley family.

Dave Lilley, grandson of Jack who started the Triumph dealership back in 1959, runs a parallel line to the traditional business of new bike sales. He offers pre-built custom Triumphs, utilising the 400 or more accessories available.

"It's very unusual for a main dealer to do specials," explains Rob, from Jack Lilley's Romford branch. "Dave has the idea, and all of the bikes on display are his designs; basically a snapshot inside his head! We follow his vision, which tends not to get into too much fabrication but uses a lot of bolt-on accessories, invariably from Triumph because they've got such a good range. We use local painters for the finishing touches."

The specials on display certainly surprised some visitors who didn't expect to see a main dealer at a custom show. Dave Lilley explained: "That's why this type of event is so useful, because it shows people what we as a main dealer can do. They say 'Oh, I didn't know that you did that. You're a main dealer and you've also got all of this going on."

The varied machines on the stand made it easy to see how a rider could be inspired to make changes, secure in the certainty that those bespoke modifications were reversible if a change in styling direction set in.

Dave was very specific about the nature of the specials they create. "This is not customising, what we do, because we don't get a frame and cut it or weld it. Everything we do uses off-the-shelf items. If someone wanted to put one of these bikes back to standard then they could. On the green T120, everything bar three items are Triumph accessories. Those items are the exhaust system, where we've removed the cat, plus the shocks. On the Street Twin, again, only three items are non-Triumph; the rear shocks, exhaust silencers and fat bar clamps. The handlebars are still Triumph."

With the exception of one custom-framed machine, and special paint and exhausts, all of the machines tweaked by Dave Lilley could be attainable with judicious trawling through the Triumph catalogue and the application of some imagination. A single idea is all it takes to inspire a build as far as Dave is concerned. "When an idea comes into my head, I source the bits. I'm useless with spanners, so I don't get involved with that." The Scrambler came about because "I fell in love with the exhaust I saw when I went to a show last year. And Triumph doesn't do a large-engine scrambler, so I thought I'd change a T120 into a scrambler". The Lilley's specials are pure Hinckley Triumph at their core, where the exterior alterations show people how they can create their own individual machines. The Street Twin, for example, "lends itself to a very 1970s type bike, with the blue metal flake and white wheels.

"The old oil-cooled Bonnie was launched in 2001 and we've just sold our last one, so it's had a run of 15 years. You're not buying it for cutting edge technology, you are buying it for the Triumph brand, the heritage. There are so many accessories that you can make it your own. It's very rare that you get a row of Bonnevilles parked up and they look the same. Everybody can make it their own,

whether they want old school or all matt black; whatever it is, you can do it."

Dave sees this customising service as an ongoing progression. "There is a definite burgeoning market for that kind of customer. It is a parallel marketplace where the new customer is coming in, maybe a bit younger, with an eye for something a bit more bespoke, a bit more individual. So there is a definite trend and I can see that trend going on and on. It's not something that will stop. There are, of course, some riders who do it purely for the lifestyle. There are also those who do use their bikes every day, and I have quite a few customers who do. They just want it to be their own and not like everybody else.

"The majority of these are new customers to the brand. So that is an interesting development. The older customer traditionally just picks one off the peg and is gone – and that's still there, they still exist. But this new market is great. You know it is great for a dealership to be able to offer that as a second stream. And I think Triumph particularly lends itself to that".

Everything, as this third-generation member of the Lilley family remarked "comes around". Jack Lilley was a motorbike builder and racer, and specials were always a part of the business. Back in the late 1950s they started with dabbling in customising and painting Lambrettas. In 1991, the company was one of the original Hinckley Triumph dealers. A 19-year-old Dave watched his father create racing specials for the IoM, Thundersport and Supersport. "We were involved in all sorts. These cost a sackful of money. Dad would get involved in creating specials which would cost us 15 or 16 grand and then we'd end up selling it for about 10!"

Fifteen years later, Dave had taken the helm. "We were approached by a guy who helped develop the Daytona 675, and asked if we'd support him racing British Super Sport. Why not? That began 10 or so years of sponsoring. And then I started getting into creating specials.

I was doing exactly the same as my dad did. But I really enjoy doing the specials. To me, it's about riding bikes and being individual. So making a bike special, giving it that individuality, is what to me biking is all about."

One of the Jack Lilley specials on the stand was a 2012 bike converted into a bobber. Dave laughed: "I like to think that Triumph copied us!" Joking aside, the new factory Triumph Bobber was an interesting topic, and brought Dave back to talking about the affiliation with Triumph, its legacy and placement in the British motorcycle market. Even though the custom builders have been creating bobbers for years, as a major manufacturer Triumph was, in Dave's opinion "ahead of the curve with that bike, and uniquely placed. They are very much in the market, and there's also the heritage.

"That's why I say Triumph lends itself to this market. It's got that tradition, that heritage, dating way, way back before the Hinckley Triumphs. The Triumph name is embedded in people's minds, and they are likely to wear the clothing, whether or not they've ever been in a motorbike shop. It is great to have that degree of strength as a foundation, but also, from a British brand perspective, it is great that something is still there that has that longevity."

MUTT MOTORCYCLES

BENNY THOMAS RAN Boneshakers Custom for some 20 years, making bespoke choppers which cost upward of £20k. But Benny could see wider horizons, as Paddy Digby-Baker – who was manning Mutt Motorcycles' stand – explained.

"Benny had a vision of building something that's very cool, but available to a wider market. So over the years he's developed prototypes which we brought to the market with these machines this year. We've developed the bikes so they're available from £2750, through to our top of the standard range which is about £3500. Obviously, we can do custom specials, which are a bit more expensive and more fun".

The company imports the frame and the Suzuki GN125 engines from China, and has sourced other components such as handlebars, wheels and silencers. Mutt builds and finishes the bikes, including hand-cutting the mudguards, in Birmingham. The machines are then rolled out to a dealer network, which provides sales and support. Establishing this network was the firm's main aim in recent months.

"Historically, we were selling bikes direct, which isn't ideal. If someone's in Kent and they buy a bike from us in Birmingham, there's not a lot of support that we can offer. Now they can now go to a dealer in Kent. We cover the UK from Scotland to Cornwall to the home counties and the east coast. We deliberately concentrated our efforts on this in the past three months, and the bikes are outselling our expectations.

"We've hit the market at a really relevant time as far as retro bikes are concerned. People want a bike that's built here and finished off here, and there's a trail that leads to somebody here in the UK. We are developing a brand that's quite cool and that people want to be a part of. We've got a clothing brand coming out, everything from T-shirts to waxed jackets to hats, and we're moving into a big warehouse in the centre of Birmingham where we will have everything under one roof.

"We'll have an integrated workshop, café, warehousing for the bikes, and a display of bikes, not just our own. People can come and visit, just hang out and have a coffee, go for a ride out."

The concept of Mutt Motorcycles is not dissimilar to that of the Lilley Triumph specials: take a standard bike and make it your own with the use of myriad accessories. But there's an essential difference between the two – Mutt concentrates on building comparatively low cost customs. The 'make it your own' vibe is central. Customers can have any components from any of the models shown in the brochure put onto their own Mutt. Paddy highlighted handlebar options as an example. "A lot of people prefer the Mushman handlebars to the Mongol handlebars. Particularly if they are in London, because they are just so wide, and they are getting through the traffic. People just swap them. We also have different grilles on the front, and we have various things that people can mix and match."

Mutt can also offer custom paint jobs, individually priced, although "we have some really cool standard paint colours in the range already. The majority of people usually find a paint job they're happy with in the brochure".

Mutt's core customer base is an interesting (although perhaps not unexpected) one. "A big part of our market is men and women between 25 and 55. They've had children and are perhaps looking to get back into having a bike because, as we all know, bikes are the new cool. If they went and spent £15k on a BMW or one of these wonderful MV Agustas, it's perhaps over the top. But they spend £3k on a Mutt and a crash helmet, and if it's in the garage from November to March because it's a bit chilly, then no one minds."

Paddy reckons Mutt machines give people their vision without breaking the

bank. It's not just about the look: "it is the whole lifestyle. It is a lifestyle product, as well as a motorbike – does that make sense? Because they sound like they look, and I wish we could start one up for you to hear!"

The three main movers behind Mutt are all committed to the concept. "We've independently had successful businesses, and are now in a position to go and do something we love, and try and put some motorbike building back into Birmingham. That is what we are doing. Birmingham City Council is one of our investors; we're going to bring in various apprenticeships to pay back that investment as well as paying back in hard cash. BSA was there for years so, even in a tiny way, let's try and do it again.

"It is exceedingly good fun, even if it is hard work, but then, the best things are. I retired 18 months ago, and my wife thinks I'm nuts, but it gets me out of the house.

"The Mutts are such great fun. The machines have got two years' warranty, parts and labour. They sound like they look. They cough, splutter, backfire and fart, and that's deliberate. They are just really cool, fun machines. People test ride them and come back smiling. That's what we're about, making people happy, enjoying what we do. None of us is reliant on the business to make huge revenues. We're reliant on the business to make us happy".

ITALIAN CHIC

THE HAND-CRAFTED CREATIONS on the Stile Italiano stand might seem to be poles apart from the pick-n-mix specials made by Jack Lilley and Mutt Motorcycles. In fact they share a common theme. Just as the dealer-built bikes are the product of a clear, determined vision, so are the beautifully customised motorcycles produced by Gianluca and his associates.

Based in Italy, Stile Italiano has worked in the UK for 20 years. They originally began exporting bikes from Italy, and today 50% of the business is still with the UK. There's also a presence in the American market, where they are known solely as a classic bike vendor. The specials, as Gianluca explained, are very much a creative sideline built for one over-riding reason. "We build what we build because – simply – we like them. The biggest part of our business is trading in classic and investment motorcycles, top end motorcycles. But because we were bored with just selling, we decided to build different things. Classic bikes, the investment bikes, must be original and perfect, but specials are different. You see what you have in your mind, and then you try to make it real.

"90% of the time a machine is not the client's vision; rarely is it the client's idea. We have the idea and we share that idea. When the bike is finished and we have displayed it in some shows, then it will be for sale. Sometimes we keep the bikes. So, it is a business, but it is not our main business – rather it is creating the vision that is the joy.

"For us, the build time takes as long as it takes. It depends on the bike, it depends on the timetable, because sometimes we are busy, or sometimes the build is difficult, or there are problems. Every bike is different. Usually though it takes at least three or four months for a build. All our bikes are completely different. They are different styles, different engines.

"We are eclectic and we like what we like. We like every period, and when we build we try to mix periods, but it depends on the individual motorcycle. Usually we prefer British, Italians and Harley-Davidsons; we have done some scramblers with Japanese engines, but no full Japanese bikes. We have no rules as to what the donor bike has to be. It doesn't have to be top of the range. For example, the Guzzi is a standard modern model, and we made it into a café racer. Or, we will take the engine from a standard Sportster and we then build it into something special. Even with no rules, we don't like small engines. You have to ride the bike, and we think that a small engine is a nice thing but it makes no sense.

"With all of our ideas we like to mix things up and to create something beautiful. We do everything on our own except for the paintwork and, of course, the chroming.

"Although our mechanic is very young, he does everything brilliantly. We also work with a friend who does only exhausts. We provides the drawings and decide how it must be – we don't leave it to anyone else because, in my opinion, the exhaust is the final touch on a motorcycle. If it is done in a wrong way, then all of the shape of the motorcycle will be not in the way you imagined.

"Take the Guzzi. The Guzzi is a long bike, with the shaft drive. Every exhaust, every silencer you put on, looks too heavy. I have been with Guzzis for 20 years – my first bike was a Guzzi – and the exhaust is always a problem. We did the design for this one with an exhaust that runs beneath the bike, so it does not affect the shape. So this machine, just as with all of our builds, is completed exactly to our vision." CBG

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Triple treat

The electric-start Triumph Trident offers classic riders a wail of a time

WORDS & PHOTOS BY CHRIS ROOKE

Above: Handsome from any angles, the T160 Trident is always an eye-catcher. This one boasts an unusual, if handsome, paint scheme

1: Clever 3-into-2 exhaust allows the centre pot's pipe to clear the frame downtube, while offering a suggestion that there are four cylinders in there

2: To meet emission requirements back in the mid-1970s, the T160 was fitted with a substantial air filter. This one has open bell mouths on the carbs instead. It also has some awesome stainless hosing

3: The instrument binnacle on this triple has been chromed, and the original 'oil' and 'turn' stickers have been left off

4: Standard T160s were equipped with a single front disc, suitable for the traffic conditions of the time. This one has been upgraded with twin discs. Alloy rims and stainless spokes save some weight compared to the standard steel wheels

SEVEN YEARS AFTER the first Triumph T150 triple was launched, its upgraded successor, the T160, came onto the scene. The British bike industry was on life support but somehow Norton-Villiers-Triumph had made more than 200 improvements to the original triples in an effort to keep up with the Oriental opposition.

The T160 boasted a three cylinder ohv engine slanted forward in a sexy, aggressive style; an electric start (which actually worked); a four-into-two exhaust system so it looked vaguely like a four-cylinder powerplant; that slanting engine like the BSA Rocket 3 which looked so much sportier than the upright Triumph T150; a five-speed gearbox, a left-side gearchange and disc brakes front and rear.

The T160 featured classy and classical styling in the true Triumph tradition. It produced a fabulous exhaust sound and offered a top speed in excess of 120mph. The three-pot engine had a 120° crankshaft which let it rev higher with less vibration than the over-stressed big twins of the time.

T160s were also generally more refined than the T150, being quieter and more environmentally friendly but a tad slower. The T160 wasn't specifically detuned, but various regulations covering emissions, noise and safety meant that some power was lost. The air filter was larger and more restrictive, the carburettors were slightly tweaked, and the new regulations had to be passed after the bike had covered several thousand miles, not just when new. While the earlier T150s passed the emissions tests when new, they weren't always as efficient with a few miles on the clock… the annular discharge silencers (aka 'black caps') kept the noise down but were also more restrictive.

To meet American safety regulations, the gearchange moved from the right to the left. NVT came up with the pragmatic but rather agricultural solution of running a shaft right through the engine, exiting through the primary chaincase. There was no money or time to design and build a new engine or gearbox, but surprisingly this pragmatic solution works, and works well. It provides a clean and crisp

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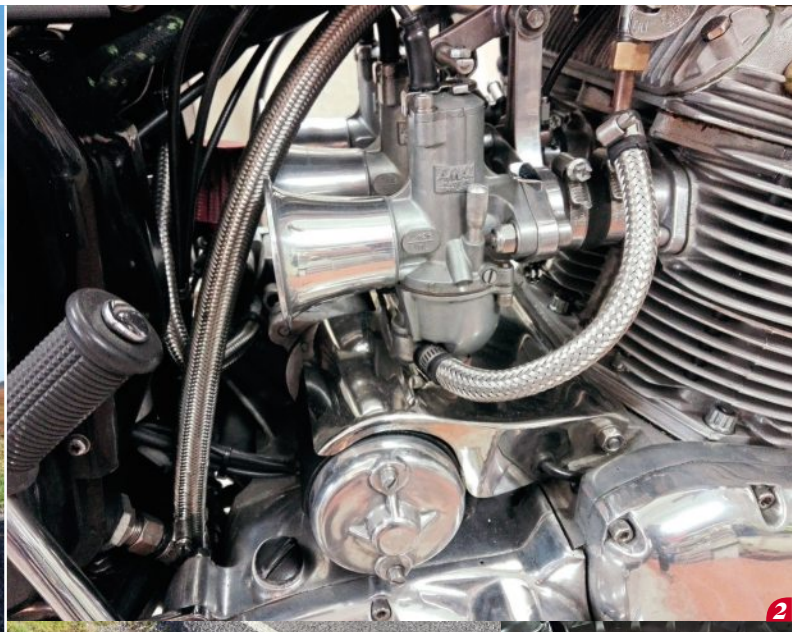
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gearchange – and even a neutral indicator on the instrument binnacle. Wow!

Although the T160 Trident addressed most of the issues and problems which had arisen with the T150, the world had moved on seven years – and so had the competition. Such exotica as the Kawasaki Z1 had arrived, a dohc four-cylinder horizontally-split-crankcase spaceship. By comparison the T160 was expensive. It cost nearly 50% more than a Bonneville and was pricier than the more technically advanced competition: when the Trident T160 cost £1300 a Kawasaki Z1B was £1249.

Small surprise then, that the T160 remained in production for only a year until its manufacture was brought to an abrupt halt by the collapse of NVT. That might've been the end of a sad story – but it's not. The T160 remains one of the greatest and sexiest British bikes ever built, and is now a very sought-after and desired machine.

The Trident seen here spent much of its life in America and was re-imported several years ago. It had a full rebuild when one of the T160's foibles was discovered; the centre conrod snapped and punched its way out of the front of the central crankcase. This is not entirely unknown with Tridents and many owners choose to fit steel or billet machined conrods in order to avert such major engine failure. Luckily, parts availability for these machines is very good and only a few parts are not easily available. Primary chains, for example, were a one-off component for the T160 and are no longer made. Owners fit a belt drive or an uprated chain with new sprockets if the chain needs replacement.

Ownership costs today are relatively high for a British bike, although they haven't kept pace with the values of some Oriental competitors. That Kawasaki 900 Z1B, which cost £50 less than a T160 when they were both new, is worth around £14k today; up to 50% more than an equivalent T160. Purchase prices for decent Tridents have risen in recent years, and restoration can also be expensive. An engine rebuild can easily run to around £3000. There

PRICE GUIDE
£6500 to £11,000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Poor fuel consumption. Heavy to manoeuvre at low speed. Propensity to smoke (quite badly). Vibration at high revs; better than a twin, but still very noticeable. Can pull slightly to the left due to the off-set engine

ALSO CONSIDER
Laverda Jota 1000: faster (touching 140mph) and more exotic, but early models had poor electrics and later models had revised cranks giving less power. Kawasaki H2 750: incredibly fast, known as the Widowmaker – need we say more? Yamaha XS750: cheaper and a good solid reliable bike with shaft drive and few foibles

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BUY IT NOW

This recently repatriated T160 should be ready to ride. Since it returned from Canada, it's had an extensive overhaul (including top end, starter motor, electronic ignition, etc). Documents show 10k miles from new. £10,500 from A28 Classics in East Sussex

Above: Slim export fuel tank and wide bars make even a heavy bike like this easy to throw around out there on the road. But you do notice the mass when you stop…

MANUFACTURED: 1975 / 1976 Engine: ohv air-cooled triple **BORE/STROKE:** 67mm x 70mm **CAPACITY:** 741cc **COMPRESSION:** 9.5:1 (some later models 9.0:1) **POWER:** 58bhp @ 7250rpm **CARBURETTORS:** 3 x 27mm Amal Concentrics **LUBRICATION:** dry sump, six pints **CLUTCH:** single plate, dry **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Renolds duplex chain **TRANSMISSION:** five gears, left foot change **IGNITION:** battery, triple coils **STARTING:** kick / electric **FRONT SUSPENSION:** telescopic forks, two-way damping **REAR SUSPENSION:** swinging arm, twin Girling adjustable shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** Lockheed 10in disc **REAR BRAKE:** Lockheed 10in disc **FRONT TYRE:** 4.10 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 4.10 x 19 **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31½in **WHEELBASE:** 58 inches **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6½in **DRY WEIGHT:** 502lb **ACCELERATION:** Zero to 60mph in 5.8 seconds **BRAKING:** 27ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 120mph

are no less than 14 engine castings on a triple, and the three-cylinder engine inevitably contains more components than a Triumph twin. Nor can its running costs be called economical: a T160 generally returns around 35/40mpg on a good day.

However, the T160 offers its owner plenty of scope to improve and upgrade with modern components.

The featured bike has been lightly modified with a few upgraded parts together with a plethora of stainless steel, polished alloy and chrome. The large and restrictive airbox has been removed and replaced with open bellmouths, and the carbs re-jetted to suit. It wears the smaller 2.5 gallon tank (the other option is 4.5 gallons) in a custom, red, white and blue livery. Braking has been improved with twin vented discs and AP callipers at the front end. A twin disc conversion makes all the difference to the braking and kits are readily available, if a bit pricey. The original chromed, steel wheels have been exchanged for lighter alloy rims which give a sportier look to the bike.

What matters to many owners, above all else, is the sound of the triple engine at full bore. *THAT* sound! The rasping wail of a triple at full throttle stirs something primeval in all who hear it. Triumph twins sound good and have a deep, thunderous roar, but nothing compares to a triple on full song. They rev freely to around 8000rpm and the wail is like a banshee, sending shivers up your spine.

The T160 was a good bike when it was built, and it's an exciting, involving and inspiring classic today. If only it had been launched in 1963, when the Trident project was in its infancy, then the fate of the British bike industry might have been so different. Possibly true, but 'if only' is perhaps the most common phrase uttered by any British bike enthusiast! CBG

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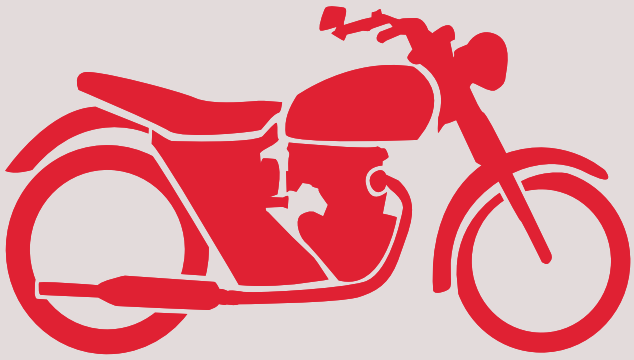

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Easy access

Another cracking candidate for newcomers to the classic scene

PHOTOS BY ROWENA HOSEASON

Above: How to make an engine appear larger than it is: reduce the size of everything surrounding it

1: Fooled you? Of course it didn't, but it would make anyone look twice

2: Flat-slide carbs work well with the engine, and in this case they breathe through a decently no-restrictive set of filters

3: Once upon a time this was a standard XS650D, first registered in 1980. In its current incarnation it was offered for sale at £4850 last autumn, and sold at £4100

BETWEEN 1970 AND 1985, Yamaha built and sold some 40 different variations on its parallel twin 650 theme. The firm's first four-stroke proved to be both adaptable and engaging, easy to live with in its roadster or custom configurations, and a great basis for any sort of special. The straightforward sohc 654cc engine side-stepped an entire generation of camchain calamities, and tuning shops soon demonstrated that its beefy, roller bearing big end was more than robust enough to cope with big bore kits and gas-flowed heads.

For a while, XS650s stole the show in sidecar motocross competition. Then they found favour as highway star West Coast customs, were transformed into drag-bikes, trikes and choppers... and now the wheel has turned yet again.

A new generation of bike builders has discovered that the handsome air-cooled engine makes an eye-catching statement in a café racer chassis, while the whole bike lends itself to street-tracker style.

If you're planning on throwing away half the motorcycle then there's no need to shop around for a pristine, first generation XS1. As so often occurs with any kind of classic, the early drum-braked machines have some kind of collectible cachet to them, so they're the most expensive and the least sophisticated of the breed. The XS2, imported into the UK in 1972, is marginally better and came with an electric start – but it handled no better than the initial batch of bikes.

The XS650B, and especially its successors, are the ones to seek out. To solve the 650's steering problems, Yamaha drafted in British factory tester Percy Tait and came up with a significantly revised chassis based on his recommendations. These frames are braced and gusseted, with beefed-up swinging arm mounts and steering head, better suspension and a twin disc front brake.

The XS reached its ultimate incarnation with the 'D' model from 1977 with (at last) a decent front

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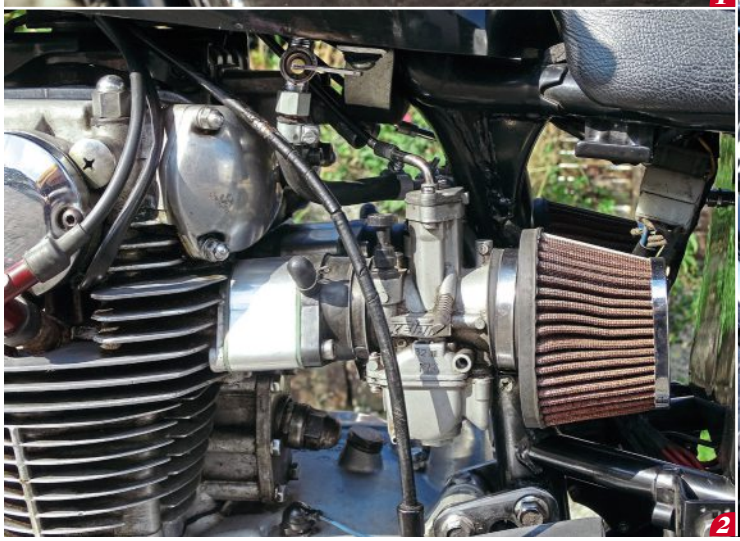
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end. The 35mm forks can be re-valved and re-sprung, giving modern-day rebuilders the option to upgrade the internals during refurbishment. You can tell these models from the single-piece front mudguard, unsupported by stays. Later E and F models have much the same spec as the D although wheel and tyre sizes change, and some bikes came with a drum back brake.

Almost inevitably the 650's mass increased during its development, and power dropped as emission controls tightened – air intake and exhaust systems became more restrictive and carb sizes shrank slightly. A standard, late 1970s' XS650 output around 48bhp and was good for a touch over the ton. Which is another reason why they're such good candidates for the chop'n'bob treatment: there's a feisty bike underneath all those filters, silencers and big heavy mudguards.

The machine you see here is a 1980 XS650D, and it's been given the full treatment to improve the handling, performance and reliability. There are several reputable international XS specialists, so you can source your ideal spec straight off the shelf.

This owner went for Heiden Tuning's full bore stainless headers with torque inducer inserts, paired with Heiden reverse cone megas: "It sounds beautiful!" Heiden-supplied Keihin PWK flat slide carbs were specified to suit the exhaust; not cheap, but trying to synchronise carbs to a mismatched exhaust system can be time consuming. A Boyer electronic ignition system takes care of the sparks, then the builder turned his attention to the steering and stopping.

PRICE GUIDE

£1500 to £5000
(unmodified, standard spec)

FAULTS & FOIBLES

At 'classic' speeds, the suspect steering of the early models isn't likely to cause problems, but ground clearance isn't great on any incarnation. Like any old parallel twin, vibes can be felt at sustained high speeds. See main text for recommended upgrades to resolve most other issues

ALSO CONSIDER

BSA A65; the British equivalent, more expensive, no electric start. Kawasaki W650; retro rather than classic, less straightforward to customise. BMW R80; another blank canvas for building a special, similar prices

SPECIALISTS

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OWNERS' CLUB

Vintage Japanese: vjmc.com
XS650 Forum: XS650.com

BUY IT NOW

If you lean towards 'stock' rather than 'special', North Cornwall Motorcycles have a 1977 XS650 up for £4250, with a full MoT, upgraded rear shocks and that eye-catching retro paint-job. 01288 355162 / ncmc.co.uk

He fitted bronze swinging arm bushes and taper needle-roller steering head bearings; Hagon progressive springs in the forks and Hagon shocks at the back. The lightened brake discs also came from Heiden, as did the alloy fork brace. The slimline polished stainless mudguards were shipped from Australia; Red Max supplied the black flat-tracker handlebars and glass fibre battery box. The original alloy rims were rebuilt with stainless spokes, and the old steel petrol tank was replaced with a glass fibre item, protected against ethanol with Caswell's sealant. Alloy brackets and stacks of stainless fittings, a

Above right: If you want a bike with some serious grunt, lively handling, good brakes and a certain twin-cylinder charm, try an XS650. We found this machine on display at North Cornwall Motorcycles. It's since been sold but they may well have something similar in stock. See ncmc.co.uk

Above: Nothing unnecessary. Apart from a tacho. Most people like a tacho. We have no idea why

skinny seat and a custom paint job complete the deal. All that adds up to some 25kg of saved weight, bringing the wet weight of the XS down to under 200kg – much more manageable.

Many builders choose to leave the engine near stock if it's running smoothly: there's still no sense in fixing what ain't broke. But even the most robust motor might need a rebuild after four decades.

MANUFACTURED: 1971 to 1985 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled sohc parallel twin **BORE / STROKE:** 75mm x 74mm **CAPACITY:** 654cc **COMPRESSION:** 8.4:1 **POWER:** 48bhp @ 7500rpm **TORQUE:** 40lb-ft @ 5500rpm **CARBURETION:** 2 x 34mm CV Mikuni **CLUTCH:** Wet multi-plate **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Gear **IGNITION:** Battery, coil **LIGHTING:** 12V alternator **STARTING:** Kick / electric **FRONT SUSPENSION:** 35mm tele forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shock **FRONT BRAKE:** 2 x 267mm discs **REAR BRAKE:** 267mm disc (drum on some models) **FRONT TYRE:** 19 x 3.50 **REAR TYRE:** 18 x 4.00 **WHEELBASE:** 55.5in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31in **BRAKING:** 33ft from 30mph **ACCELERATION:** 0 to 60mph 7 seconds **TOP SPEED:** 108mph
(All data for D and later models)

Increased oil consumption, a loss of mid-range power, rough running and odd rattles would all suggest that the time has come to pull it apart. And once you've stripped the motor, you have the option of taking it out to 707 or even 840c.

You can keep the original firing pattern of 360° (with its inherent vibration) or swap to 270° for that V-twin type burble. Boyer electronic ignitions work well with the standard set-up, while the Pamco kit is recommended for the 270 scenario. If you don't need to strip the engine then pay particular attention to the oil filter before you clock up many miles. It becomes quite fragile with age and can allow material to circulate around the engine – better to fit a spin-on external unit than rely on the original component.

If you plan on re-styling the bike entirely then it's worth considering one of the factory custom semi-chop 'Special' or SE models. In truth there's nothing much special about these machines – high bars, stepped seat and a bit of bling – but they use the later spec (even electronic ignition on the final incarnation) and typically sell for lower prices than the standard models. You may also discover some bikes designated 'TX'; these will have come from an overseas market, starting with the XS2 type.

Budget to fit a modern electronic ignition – there's no point faffing around with points. Similarly, bin the original voltage regulator which is likely to malfunction and drain the battery, and save weight and hassle with a solid state reg/rec unit. Mikuni round-slide carbs bolt straight on – you can refurbish the original items but you'll get more consistent performance with modern carbs, adjusted on a rolling road to suit your ignition and exhaust systems.

The XS650 may not be anyone's idea of a 1970s superbike. It's not the biggest or fastest bike on the block. But it's easy to maintain, easy to enjoy and extremely versatile. "I owned this bike for 10 years," says its builder, "and recently blasted it around the mountain roads of northern Spain with no hassles. It looks, runs, handles and goes superbly." CBG

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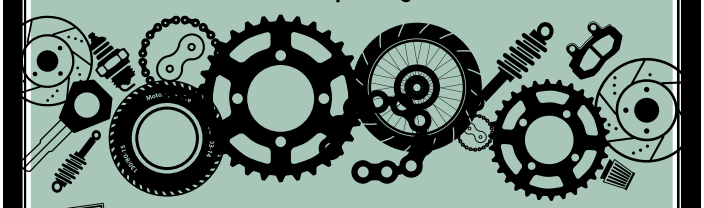

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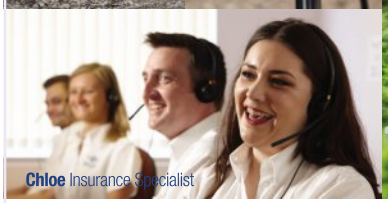

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Dynamic balance

The Strada offers perfect poise in a petite package – and higher handlebars to boot

WORDS & PHOTOS BY RICHARD JONES

Above: Hard to fault one of these as an entirely practical classic bike. They're also enormous fun to ride, especially where there are bends in the road

1: Clocks are clear, familiar Veglias with Morini logos, as you'd expect. As you would also expect with Veglia clocks it is perfectly possible to be travelling at 10kph while standing still. And yes; kilometres

2: If ever a bike badge seemed intended to confuse the onlooker, this must be it. 3½? Parts supply is good, leading to prolonged happy ownership

3: The front brake may look familiar, but is in fact Morini's own manufacture – and works well. Front forks are typical period Italian: stiff and effective

4: The Morini engine is one of motorcycle engineering's true jewels. Handsome, interesting and engaging. Spot the enrichment lever on the carb?

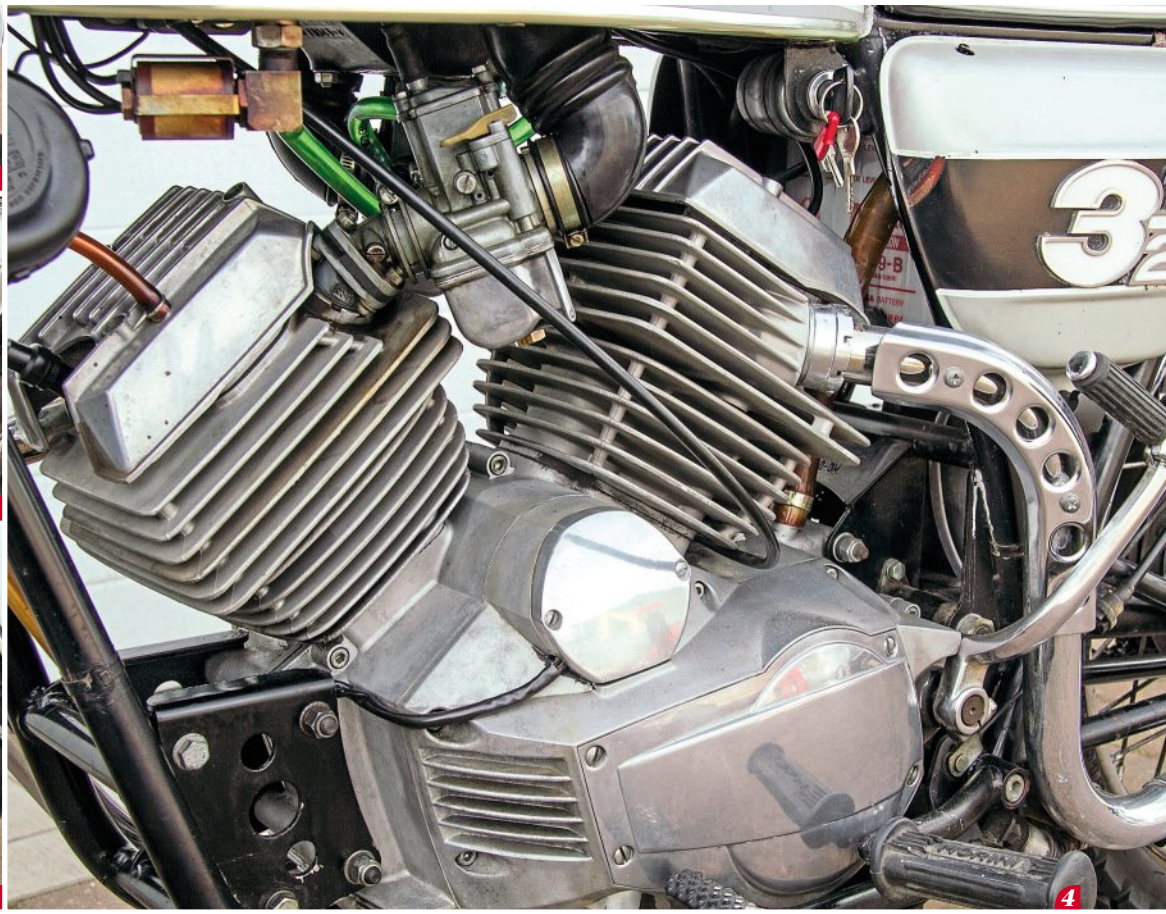
THE MORINI 350 fits the bill in so many circumstances. For modern bike riders seeking an entry-level classic, the 3½ is comprehensible and characterful. For older riders who want something smaller and more manoeuvrable than a big old Brit twin, the 3½ is perfectly proportioned. For Britbike riders, the brake and gear levers are the 'English way round' on older models. For Japanese riders, later versions feature left-foot gear selection. For everyone, the 3½ promises plenty of peppy performance at a reasonable price.

John Fallon at Made In Italy Motorcycles showed us around this 1976 Strada. In general, John says the 350s are "easy to manage and not too heavy, a reasonable physical size. Mechanically they're good with a brilliant chassis; you have to ride them hard but they're impressive when you give them a bit of stick. They seem very robust – we've had few problems with them. The paintwork on this one is a bit faded but the rest of it is in good condition. It fires up first kick and runs like a dream."

While the Sport is better known, the Strada finds favour with riders who prefer its more upright riding position. There are a few subtle differences between the two 350s. Both use Morini's air-cooled ohv 344cc engine with its cylinders arranged in an inline 72-degree Vee, and that angle has an important effect upon the overall length of the Morini. Ducati spreads its cylinders further apart at 90 degrees, which contributes to the extended wheelbase of its bikes. By contrast, the narrower angle of the Morini V-twins aids their agile handling.

The Sport outputs 39bhp at 8500rpm while the Strada was rated at 35bhp at 8250, although early sources suggest that the Sport was 42bhp and the Strada 39. If you've ever run one on a dyno and know the actual output from the rear wheels then drop us a line. The actual power was certainly enough for both bikes to have a top speed of over 95mph.

The differences between the two models were limited to the compression ratio (10:1 on the Strada) and camshaft (lumpy on the Sport), front brake (200mm single-sided 2ls stopper on the Strada) and rear hub, plus the obvious higher handlebars and



cosmetic tweaks for the 'touring' machine. Take the word 'touring' with a pinch of salt – the Strada is certainly more roadster than sportster, but it's a very long way from a Gold Wing…

With regular maintenance the 350 motor proves robust enough to see 60 or 70,000 miles without a major overhaul. A six-speed gearbox helps to extract perky performance from either variant. A toothed belt drives the cams while, notably, the engine incorporates 'Heron' heads where the valves are parallel, not angled, the cylinder head is flat and the combustion chamber is a concave dish in the piston head. These were used on cars – Alfa Romeo, Jaguar and Volvo among others – and brought the benefits of cheaper manufacture. They boost torque throughout the rev range and offer considerable fuel economy – 60mpg is a possibility on the Strada.

The engine utilises a one-piece forged steel crankshaft, ball bearings for the main bearing, plain bearings on the big end, and single common-pin conrods. A maximum torque of 25lb/ft is accessible at around 6000rpm, which translates to around 70mph in top gear. The six-speed gearbox keeps the motor spinning sweetly between 6000 and 8000rpm; it'll pull smoothly at two grand but needs more revving to make rapid progress.

The rest of the bike is blessed with Italian components typical of the period – twin 25mm Dell'Orto carburettors, Marzocchi suspension, Ducati Electronica ignition and Grimeca disc brakes (from 1976) and cast wheels (from 1977); drum brakes and wire wheels on earlier machines. With fuel, the Strada weighs around 330lb and it steers with the same reassuring precision of the Sport. If there's one factor that endears the 350s to their riders it is the machine's dynamic balance – how well its chassis is matched to the engine's output. This is a bike that adores being let off the leash at full throttle and, unlike some classics we could mention, its motor doesn't overwhelm its manoeuvrability. Modern rubber on the 18in wheels helps.

Once you've bought a Morini twin, it should be straightforward to look after. "Maintenance is very simple," says John, "and they're very reliable. Spares availability is excellent through North Leicester Motorcycles." But like any classic, the Morini has its quirks. The original switchgear is fairly horrible and the lighting ain't great. If the suspension isn't

PRICE GUIDE
£3000 to £6000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Early electronic ignition systems are weak; talk to the MRC about a suitable replacement modern system and how to fit it. Cambelts must be replaced every 15,000 miles (check the service history). A and B-roads suit the 350 best: motorways can be a bore. The riding position, even on the Strada, is quite compact, so larger riders tend not to find them comfortable

ALSO CONSIDER
Moto Guzzi V35: less sprightly, more touring than sports. Morini 500: less common and not much faster but rather more relaxed. Laverda Alpino/Montjuic and 350 variants: a parallel twin, not a Vee but with many similar Italian attributes

SPECIALIST
North Leicester MCs: northleicestermotorcycles.com

OWNERS' CLUB
Morini Riders: morini-riders-club.com

BUY IT NOW

You need look no further than North Leicester Motorcycles for a tidy, serviced and warranted Strada. This electric start 1982 K2 model has covered just 22,500 miles and even has its original toolkit. £4650 from northleicestermotorcycles.com / 01530 263381

Above: As a lively, light, personable and pretty quick classic, the Morini is hard to beat.

Many thanks to John Fallon and the staff at Made in Italy for their time and assistance in preparing this feature

worn out then it should feel fairly firm; you don't get a cushy ride on these bikes. The dual seat is not the most spacious and your pillion pal would have to be pretty patient to endure long distance rides on the back. The speedo is charmingly optimistic – if you believe what it says then your ego will be boosted and you're unlikely to get many speeding tickets.

The drum brake needs to be set up carefully, and it's probably not as effective as the 1976-onwards disc brake in dry conditions. Once the drum brake has bedded-in, however, it's more effective in wet conditions than most discs of the era. If braking is a concern you should look for a later 350 with disc brakes as standard – those models are cheaper than the wire-wheels versions anyway – and swap to the smaller master cylinder from the 250 to increase hydraulic pressure. Later models also benefit from an uprated alternator and also an improved gearbox.

For true modern convenience, look out for the K2 development that was built from 1982 and features an electric start, left-foot gearchange and a modified cam and carb jets for more mid-range flexibility. The later bikes are no faster than the first but they tend to feel more refined and easier to adapt to if you're used to modern motorcycles.

Back in the day it used to be said that if you were happy with the handling of a 750 Honda then you probably shouldn't buy a Morini 350. But if you longed for a Ducati 750 then you definitely should buy a Morini 350, and learn to love the 3½ in its own right. The same is true for the classic enthusiast today – it's no accident that the marque club is called the Morini Riders' Club. The Strada is still a lively bike: lovely to look at but it is best experienced from the saddle. CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1973 to 1985 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv 72-degree V-twin **BORE / STROKE:** 62mm x 57mm **CAPACITY:** 344cc **COMPRESSION:** 10:1 **POWER:** 35bhp @ 8250rpm **TORQUE:** 25lb/ft @ 5900rpm CARBS: 2x 25mm Dell'Orto VHB 25BS **TRANSMISSION:** Helical gear primary drive **CLUTCH:** Dry multi-plate **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump, gear oil pump **GEARS:** Six-speed constant mesh **ELECTRICS:** 100W 12V alternator **FRAME:** Duplex tubular cradle **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Marzocchi tele forks, two-way oil damped **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin Marzocchi (or Ceriani) shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** 200mm 2ls drum **REAR BRAKE:** 130mm sls drum **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 4.10 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 54in **WEIGHT:** 317lb dry **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31in **ACCELERATION:** 0 to 60mph in 5.4sec **FUEL ECONOMY:** 62mpg average **BRAKING:** 28ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 98mph

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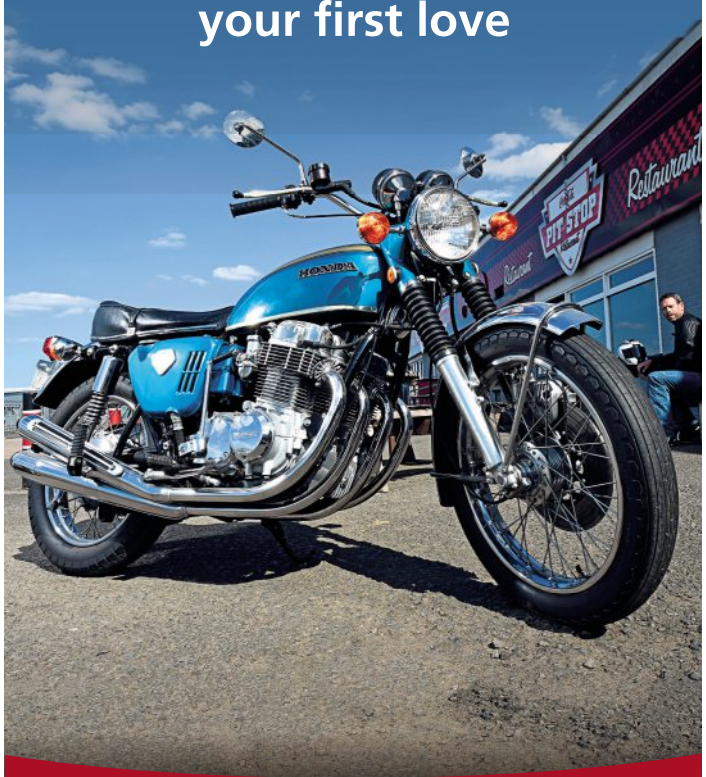

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Instant classic

Honda's fab four offers reliable, round the clock fun

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Boring out the slow-selling CB350F and updating the suspension led to the CB400F being hailed as the best-handling Honda ever

1: Slim and sexy. We're uncertain about the rope…

2: Keihin carbs can overflow if clogged up; a good annual clean is a good idea

3: Instantly recognisable pipes still look good after 25 years' use and abuse

4: Later F models had a pillion rest loop to reduce leg muscle fatigue

5: Honda 400/4s are extremely reliable and easily attain round-the-clock mileages with routine maintenance, so a low odo display may be misleading

6: Iconic pipes allow easy access to the oil filter but not the camchain adjuster. This needs to be adjusted when the engine is running, so a degree of caution is required to avoid burnt fingers

THE I-SPY BOOK of motorcycles says: "Motorcycling is fun. It is about freedom and the open air; it is about cutting through traffic jams and exhilarating bend-swinging on the open road." It gives 15 points for spotting a CB400F, which certainly ticks all the boxes, citing it as "a little gem… with good looks allied to turbine smooth performance, sparkling acceleration and a top speed of over 100mph it became an instant classic".

Honda released its first mass-produced four, the CB750, in October 1968 to a rapturous reception. Demand was high for an alternative to twins and the CB750F's success led to the CB500F in 1972 then the CB350F, withdrawn after two years and never marketed in Britain.

The CB400F was born out of the ashes of the CB350F, its 51mm bore with 50mm stroke giving 408cc – except in France and Japan where a 400cc licence limit dictated 399cc. The first Honda four to feature a sixth gear, the 400/4 came in a simple understated varnish blue or ruby red livery which accentuated the sexiest downpipes ever seen, sweeping across and down into a single megaphone.

The 400/4 earned its Super Sport branding; fun, fast, flickable, slim, smooth, sexy. It handled, pulled a ton, had a good seat height and quickly gained approval. 105,160 bikes were produced from 1975 to 1978 and 15,549 were sold in the UK. They cost Honda as much to manufacture as the 750/4 but sold for a mere £669, compared with the 500/4 at £859 and 750/4 at £979.

Initially they didn't sell well in the US, touted as café racers, although the rests weren't true rearsets and the handlebars were pretty flat rather than ace bars or clip-ons. Americans complained about a puny horn which couldn't make itself heard in traffic, but seemed less bothered by the huge trafficators on a substantial bar attached to the headlight bracket, and the black side panels. A slight restyle in 1975 brought higher, wider bars and marginally further forward rider rests. Interestingly a rubber block was attached to the sidestand for the US and German models. If the rider forgot to lift the sidestand then the block dragged along the ground and kicked the sidestand up automatically.

400/4 F models started out with pillion rests on the swinging arm, which kept pillions from getting too comfy or not concentrating in the bends. From frame number 1056884, pillion rests were attached to the frame by a new triangular loop. Frame number 1073400 introduced the F2, with candy antares red or parakeet yellow pinstriped tanks, and an angled font for the *400FOUR* label on the side panels.

Restored examples often bear an eclectic mix of

1

2

3

4

5

6

paintwork and logos. In 1977 a locking petrol cap was introduced, and from engine number 1084315 longer cylinder head studs were installed to prevent weeps. The F1 model was for North America only with a plain parakeet yellow or ruby red tank and black side panels with the F-type early logo.

The featured machine has been with its owner for the last 27 years. With five previous owners, a disconnected speedo and suspiciously low mileage, it was less than pristine when purchased. A rusted, leaking matt black tank with fluorescent Honda 'wing' stickers topped matt black downpipes leading to an artfully sawn off CM125 silencer matching the rear light assembly. The vertically-challenged previous owner had removed most of the foam from the two-four sports seat, and fitted small shocks so it grounded out easily. Someone had sawn off the seat bracketry and extended the rear frame by five inches. Superdream 250 Comstar wheels completed the look. Dodgy wiring and coils with HT leads chopped and joined with connectors made rainy days challenging, WD40 a favourite perfume, and led to an hilarious evening when a golfer with a tub of Vaseline saved the soggy HT leads and got the rider 180 miles home in a monsoon!

Gradually the 400/4 was fixed up, returning components to standard when possible. Original soft metal engine screws were replaced with Allen bolts. A major restoration helped, particularly a new wiring loom, electronic ignition and coils, but an over-enthusiastic polisher took most of the wording off the dipstick surround. Reinstating the seat bracket but overloading the pillion seat too often with camping gear meant seat bases broke regularly. David Silver Spares now offers reasonably priced metal based replica seats. As with many machines of its era, this bike is never going to be standard but it doesn't matter to the owner. Lots of 400/4s were turned into specials, café racered, tuned, bored out with Yoshimura kits and generally lovingly mucked about with.

Brake hoses were replaced with Goodridge about 26 years ago. The headlight and indicator bracket was unobtainable for years; this one has been welded a few times and is shorter on one side; David Silver Spares now has aftermarket alternatives.

PRICE GUIDE
£800 to £6500

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Camchain neglect can be costly to remedy. Coils, points and wiring make a common source of frustration but are easily replaced, as are exhaust systems (at a price). Upgrading to electronic ignition is sensible. Rattles on starting should even out once the engine warms up. Regular oil changes (every 1500 miles) and filter changes (every 3000 miles) are essential. Balancing the carbs is possible with gauges (until you blip the throttle and they go out of sync); a Colortune kit really helps with the mixture

ALSO CONSIDER
Yamaha RD400; the sensible two-stroke alternative.
Kawasaki Z650; physically bigger and heavier, frequently cheaper

SPECIALISTS
David Silver Spares

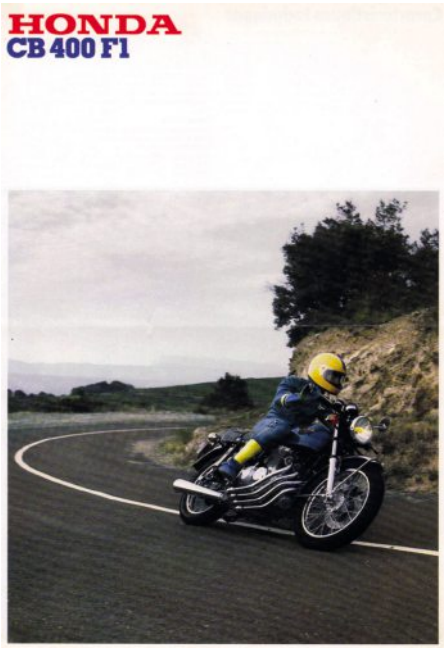
OWNERS' CLUB
Honda Owners' Club: hoc.org.uk
Honda SOHC owners: sohc4.net/cb400

BUY IT NOW

Check out Oxford Classic Honda if you're looking for a good 400/4. They regularly have excellent examples in stock, including machines like this 1977 F2 which was restored a few years back and still has its original exhaust. £2995 from classichondamotorcycles.co.uk / 01865 326358

Above: It's more difficult to spot those distinctive pipes from this side

Below: Gear pattern is shown on the casing but there's no indication of which gear you're in. Excessively worn gear change linkages will eventually fail, the retaining washer and circlip are often replaced with a C clip



MANUFACTURED: 1975-1978 **ENGINE:** SOHC four-cylinder transverse in-line air cooled four-stroke **BORE / STROKE:** 51 x 50mm (2.01in x 1.97in) **CAPACITY:** 408.4cc (24.9 cu-in) **COMPRESSION:** 9.4:1 **POWER:** 37bhp @ 8500rpm **TORQUE:** 24lb-ft @ 7500rpm **CARBURETTOR:** 4x 20mm Keihins **IGNITION:** contact breaker and two coils **LIGHTING:** 12V, 12 Ah battery supplied from 156W alternator and solid state regulator **LUBRICATION:** wet sump **CLUTCH:** wet multi-plate **GEARBOX:** six-speed **PRIMARY DRIVE:** chain **FINAL DRIVE:** chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 10.5in/214mm hydraulic single disc **REAR BRAKE:** 6.5in/160mm rod operated sls drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Showa telescopic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** swinging arm, twin shock **FRONT TYRE:** 3.00 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 3.50 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 53.3in/1355mm **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31in/787mm **WEIGHT:** 374.8lb/170kg (392lb with 1 gallon of fuel) **ACCELERATION QUARTER MILE:** 14.81 seconds, 86.8mph **BRAKING:** 29ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 103mph **PRICE NEW:** £669

The original (ruined) downpipes were replaced by NOS from David Silver when restored about 25 years ago. Despite dire warnings about poor quality Japanese chrome, they have stood up pretty well, although silencers have been replaced several times. According to the owner: "They are truly the sexiest downpipes – Motads don't cut it."

Starting from cold is routine as long as the battery is fully charged and the bike's not been laid up too long. Petrol on, choke on, press starter or kickstart. If it doesn't catch, try again... then vary the choke. If you flood it, kick it with the petrol off for a bit then try again. Give it a few moments to warm up then ease off the choke before heading off. You can accelerate and kick up the gears pretty quickly on a 400/4. It's rewarding to anticipate, work the gears and keep the power on tap. Kicking down several gears for tight bends lets you pull away cleanly.

Handling is positive and quick, unclassified roads are fun, but major miles and motorways aren't much of a chore, cruising at about 80mph with a range of around 120 miles. This example does 60mpg regardless of how or where it's ridden. The upright seating position is comfortable and everything, as in the finest traditions, falls easily to hand.

Lots of misty-eyed people will tell you they wish they'd never sold their 400/4s as they were the best bike they ever owned. Others will say they always wanted one, and that they were left standing by them while riding old RDs and such. 400/4s have really appreciated in value, particularly in the last few years, and are an easy classic to own and enjoy, requiring minimal maintenance. CBG

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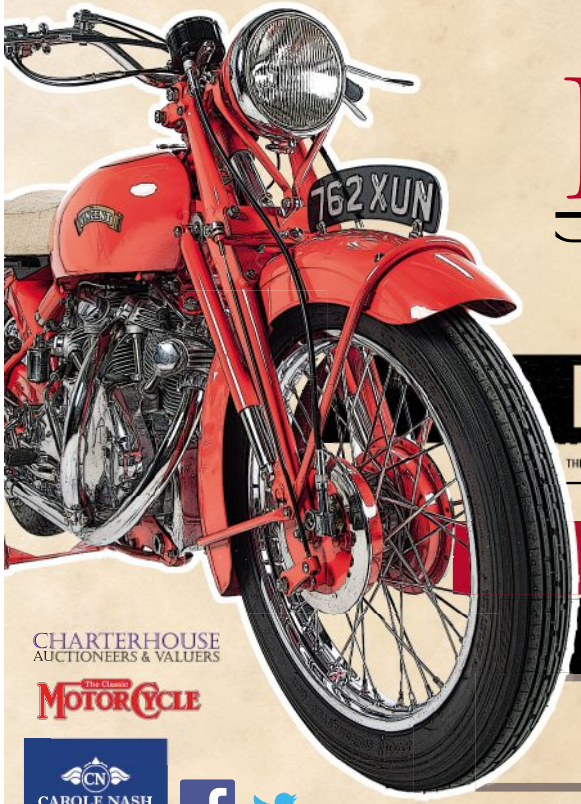

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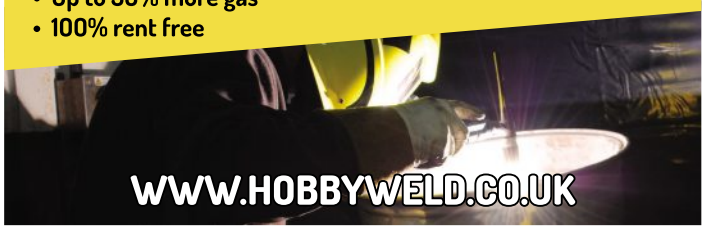

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What goes around comes around

Norton released a mere 100 rotary Classics and predicted that persuading an owner to sell would be extremely unlikely. They were right

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

IN 1919 DR FELIX WANKEL dreamed up the concept of a rotary engine and registered his first engine patent 10 years later. He achieved his dream in 1957 working with NSU; a prototype was created and he finally licensed his unique Wankel rotary engine. Fichtel & Sachs took out a licence on the engine in 1960, initially building rotary engines to use in lawnmowers, chainsaws and boats.

After announcing a Wankel-engined prototype motorcycle in 1970, Hercules launched the single rotor model W2000 in 1974 using an F&S engine. About 1800 were produced between 1974 and 1977, the Hercules being badged in Britain as a DKW.

Above: Norton's Classic design owes more to the 1970s than to the 80s, although that engine is one unique sight

Suzuki licenced the Wankel engine in 1970 and after three years of development launched its own rotary-engined machine – the water-cooled RE5 – in 1973, unfortunately coinciding with the oil crisis.

The single rotor RE5 was expensive, heavy and thirsty, with less-than-spectacular performance and unique styling which was either loved or hated. The clocks, for example, were housed in a large cylinder with a tinted lid which opened when the ignition was turned on, and the tail light was similarly cylindrical.

The styling was soon toned down, but only around 6300 were sold and production ceased in 1976.

1: Suspension and brakes will be familiar to anyone who knows their early 1980s Italian machinery, and ensures easy spares supply

2: The clocks are plain and simple, and the temperature gauge is a Very Good Idea. The choke knob was originally intended for an Austin Maxi (who remembers those!)

3: Heat dissipation was a serious priority when developing the rotary engine, as seen by all the finning. The air filter lives inside the silver box top right and feeds into the centre of the engine, then out through the alloy hangers back into the frame, then out into the carbs, collecting oil on the way. Simple, really

Although Norton announced a rotary-engined prototype to the motorcycle press in 1974, it didn't become available to the general public until 1987. Basing the internal design of its engine on the German-built Hercules, Norton bought all of Sachs' production tooling in 1977. Prototypes of the first Norton P41 Interpol 2 air-cooled twin rotaries were made available to British police forces in 1983. Using the police as product testers enabled bugs including overheating, tickover problems and blown rotor seals to be ironed out quickly. Around 380 bikes were produced; the police took just under 200, the MoD 150 and the RAC the others... however, no bikes were made available to the public.

In 1987 the long-awaited Norton Classic was launched to an eager public. Marketed as an extremely desirable limited edition 100 bike run, a glossy brochure announced that the halcyon days of British motorcycling were back and reassured potential purchasers that the Classic was worth the extremely long wait.

Based heavily on the Interpol II, stripped back and restyled, the Classic had simple understated silver-grey paintwork incorporating a black Norton logo with black and red pinstriping. Styling was really conventional right down to the 1980s rectangular tail light cluster, but with an engine so eye-catching it's impossible to ignore.

Norton's rotary engine has basically two moving parts in each of its twin chambers, a triangular rotor and the eccentric shaft upon which it rotates. The animations on YouTube might remind you of Spirograph drawing as a child; the path traced by the triangular rotors in each of the twin cylinders is pretty much how a Spirograph works. Rotary engines, with their fewer moving parts, theoretically have an advantage over standard piston engines; however, they are technically complex and prone to overheat.

PRICE GUIDE

£9000 to £15,000

FAULTS & FOIBLES

Being incorrectly stored can cause the rotor seals to stick and the carbs to gum up. Worn gearboxes can be costly to repair. Poor tickover can indicate seal damage, engine rebuilds are specialised and relatively expensive. To avoid confusion with demobbed, restyled Interpol 2s the engine and frame numbers on genuine Classics run from P43 LE001 through P43 LE100. The engine numbers stamped on the bike have a * each side of them, helping to maintain the originality and value

ALSO CONSIDER

Norton Commander (water-cooled touring machine), Hercules W2000 (weird and rare), Suzuki RE5 (more weird, more around), or if you're feeling really flush: the Dutch Van Veen OCR 1000

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BUY IT NOW

You'll wait a long while for a genuine Classic to come along, but for a fraction of the price you could buy an ex-police Interpol 2 and convert it to a roadster. This one is a non-runner, offered by W Fisk Klassic Motorcycles n Boreham, Essex, for £2500

Wankel engines with large rotors require time to warm up, which can be problematic if riders don't allow enough time for them to reach operating temperature.

The Classic has a total loss oil system. Oil from the tank in the box-section spine frame is injected in to lubricate the eccentric shaft's main bearings, after which it meets the air from the intake and passes with that air to the carbs, the resulting air/oil mix being burned as in a two-stroke. No oil is pumped when the clutch is held in, which can potentially cause problems in town, especially sitting at lights with the clutch pulled in.

A large air intake sitting just behind the forks, between the tank and engine, directs air into the engine, through the interiors of the rotors, back into a plenum chamber then into the combustion chambers via the twin carbs. The plenum chamber acts as part of the frame and also assists with heat dissipation.

1

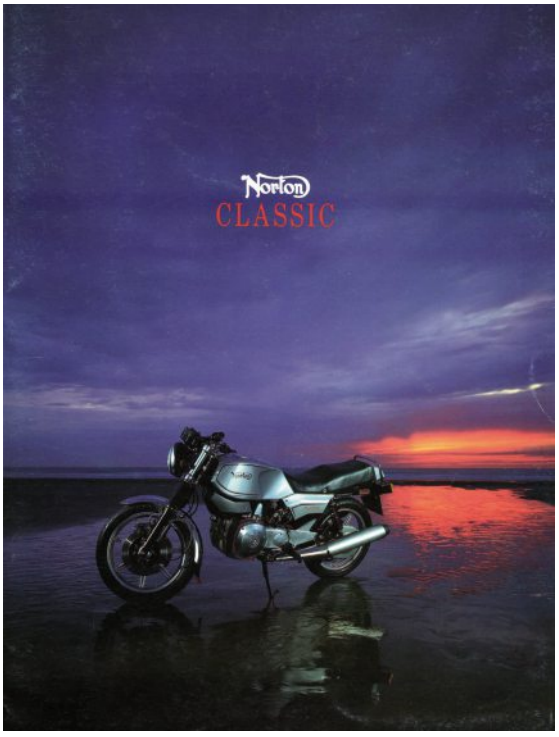
2

3

1: Handsome hand-formed alloy tank lives happily above one of the most unusual engines to come from a British manufacturer. They thrive on use, too, not storage…

2: Fully enclosed rear chain gives very long life and a complete freedom from spatter

3: The vertically-finned components are the rotor housings, inside which the rotors spin away merrily. Waterproof plug caps are essential



MANUFACTURED: 1987-88 **ENGINE:** Twin chamber air cooled Norton rotary **CAPACITY:** 588cc **COMPRESSION:** 7.5 to 1 **POWER:** 79bhp @ 9000rpm **CARBS:** SU HIF4 constant vacuum **LUBRICATION:** total loss system **CLUTCH:** wet multi-plate **PRIMARY DRIVE:** duplex chain **FINAL DRIVE:** chain **GEARS:** Five-speed **IGNITION:** twin coil electronic ignition **LIGHTING:** 12V, 14Ah battery **FRAME:** welded box spine (semi-monocoque) **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Marzocchi **REAR SUSPENSION:** Twin Konis **FRONT BRAKE:** Brembo twin disc **REAR BRAKE:** Brembo single disc **FRONT TYRE:** 100/90V18 **REAR TYRE:** 110/90V18 or 120/90V18 **WHEELBASE:** 58½ inches **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6½ inches **DRY WEIGHT:** 498lb **FUEL ECONOMY:** 40mpg **QUARTER MILE:** 12+ secs **TOP SPEED:** 130mph **PRICE NEW:** £6000

Keeping the engine's centre of mass low down makes the Classic feel lighter than it is. Extremely smooth power transmission, a practically vibe-free engine and the delightful combination of Marzocchi forks, triple Brembos and Konis provide excellent handling and braking – by 1980s standards.

The centrestand can scrape the road on left-handers so it's interesting to observe that the publicity shots in the brochure show the bike on right-handers. The fully enclosed chain and neat pair of seven-spoke cast alloy wheels help keep maintenance and cleaning to a minimum. The comprehensive toolkit included a leather key wallet, an owner's handbook and even a tax disc holder! The Classic is a spirited B-road bike whereas its successor, the heavier P53 water-cooled and panniered Commander, was aimed firmly at the touring market.

The featured machine is number 28 of the original 100. It has had one owner since new and was put into storage with a mere 2500 miles on the clock.

Some 28 years later it's just been put back on the road. Being stored for so long can cause serious problems for a rotary engine, in particular corrosion, so expert advice was sought prior to recommissioning. Norton Motors was obviously aware of potential problems and sent out a service release on preparing a Classic properly for storage. The carbs obviously needed a thorough cleaning and a major amount of tweaking was required to get it running properly again. Owner Robert is thoroughly enjoying becoming reacquainted with his Classic and putting more miles on it, reporting good, smooth handling, a responsive motor – and a big grin now he has the teething problems ironed out. CBG

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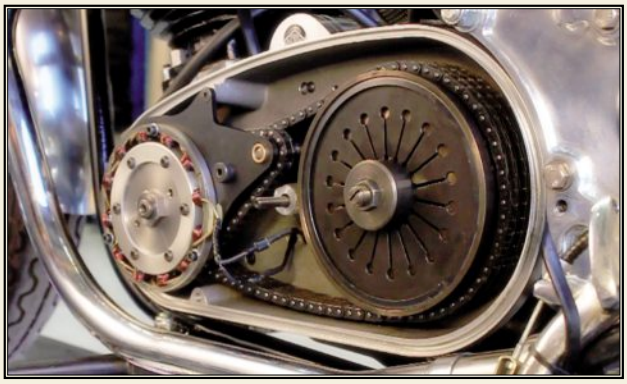

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T'BIRD TRIBULATIONS

I NOTED WITH interest an article on the Triumph Thunderbird in the December issue; the model John Bloor and his merry band of horribly successful engineers turned out in the 1990s. I have a 1994 Trident which has clocked up an astonishing 140,000 miles under my stewardship, and I like to read about stuff I have a working knowledge of. I have a deep respect for the designers of a motorcycle engine that can go so far with only routine maintenance and relentless thrashing without exploding.

Then the words 'derived from earlier plans of a Meridian (sic) Triple that never saw the light of day' came under my eye and I got cross. So I went and kicked my Trident because I don't have a horse, and hurt my toe.

Can I gently point out that the 1990s Triumph three-cylinder power plant designed at Hinckley in the late 1980s has nothing to do with the 'Diana' project that died in 1983, or the fabled T180 Thunderbird? The rumour mill of the Diana engine (one did allegedly exist, but it seems to be lost like all good alleged things. There was a wooden one, I've seen it) just persists on this sort of lazy assumption.

Triumph did build triples as there was sound marketing behind it, but no sound engineering until Mr Bloor stepped in with his lovely money and engineers. Bloor's engineers started with a clean sheet of paper (or a new computer) and copied all the good points of many bulletproof motors they had spent a lot of time researching. It worked. Didn't leak either and the 97bhp Trident version goes like hell forever. The only common factors between Meriden and Hinckley machines are the name and three-cylinder bikes, but a lot of people have made triples…

Also, can I ask that no further magazine space is devoted to Tritons? I for one am sick of bloody Tritons. I've ridden lots, nearly all were lash-ups and they have been 'magazine-articled' to death. I don't think anyone is in any doubt about the things; it has all been said, many times over. Unless someone puts a new Triumph Thruxton R engine into a Norton frame the subject should rest.

Great magazine by the way – keep it up. I hope you will anyway.

Ben Rawlinson

I can only apologise for the idiot 'Meridian' mistake. How that got past me I honestly have no idea. The engine referred to in the article is, I think, the one you see here. BSA / Triumph built several but it wasn't a good design. Again I'm happy to apologise for the misleading sentence. I was plainly suffering from an off-day when I edited the text. I know the history well enough.

Tritons? Readers like them. I don't, but readers pay my wages. Hope your toe feels better now.

Frank / CBG

Laverda illumination

I WRITE TO express appreciation for Nolan Woodbury's fine article about Laverda twins in the Nov issue. I expected this was going to be yet another rehash of the same old standard bibliographic sources about the Laverda marque, offering no real new insights. What I got was new information obtained by the author himself from primary sources (Piero Laverda, no less!), previously unpublished. Followed by some real analysis of these bikes pitted against competing marques within the context of their times, without recycling the same tired old 20/20 hindsight clichés.

As a big-time Laverda buff I wasn't expecting to learn anything new from the article about my beloved marque, but I did. Real research! Real journalism! Marvellous! Please convey my appreciation to Mr Woodbury.

Tim Pickering

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FIND US ON FACEBOOK and send us a snap of your classic which we'll share for all to admire. This month, Joris Verstrepen took centre stage with his Matchless G85CS complete with its special ABSAF engine. "The ultimate Gold Star and Inter killer!" says Joris. We can think of a couple of BSA and Norton owners who might take issue with that statement…

Post pics of your classic at www.facebook.com/ClassicBikeGuide and we'll share the best online and on these pages

VELO FELLOWS

THE VELOCETTE OWNERS' CLUB held an 'experts' forum' in Alcester last autumn. Club secretary Bill Greenwood secured a wide range of Velo know-how for the panel, comprising Dennis Quinlan who represented the Australian club; long term specialist dealer Geoff Dodkin; retired trader Ken Gardner (who admitted to owning 28 assorted samples of the make before he trimmed them out to fit a downsizing of his home); cammy specialist Ivan Rhodes, and LE Velo Club historian Dennis Frost.

There's not much that benchful doesn't know about the products of the famous Hall Green factory.

The traders reflected on the thin times when Veloce were desperate for money, on one occasion asking the Metropolitan Police if they would pay up front for the 100 LEs they ordered every year. It says a lot about the standing of the name that a cheque arrived in time to pay the wages bill! Geoff Dodkin talked about preparing a standard Venom for long distance endurance races, with no factory involvement or support, while Norton and Triumph fielded 650cc twins that were built in the factory by the racing staff.

The biggest laugh came for a tale Dennis Quinlan told about Hedley Cox, who worked in the Velo competition shop before his criticism of the company's racing policy led to a parting of the ways and to him building the Covel twin racer, comprising two KTT motors cut down to 250cc and united with a coupling of the cranks to mount in a KTT rolling chassis. Cox went on to work for Harley-Davidson, where he also disagreed with company policy and quit the industry to use his talent in other fields.

Now 88 and living in Texas, Cox recently sent Dennis his notebooks from his days at Velo, including one that is leather-bound. Apparently Cox preserved the book by cutting a piece out of company director Percy Goodman's racing leathers, which were kept in the comp shop, and binding his precious notes. It is assumed that he did this shortly before leaving the company and before Bertie went out testing again.
Jim Reynolds

Paul + Paul = excellent

PAUL D'ORLEANS' RICHLY descriptive prose on the imbalance our obsession can bring to life was erudite, rewarding to read and resonant. And what can I say about Paul Miles' refreshingly honest reflections? Great stuff.
Dave Simmons

High prices

A FRIEND AND I attended the classic car and bike show at the NEC last autumn, for the first time for some years. I was amazed that I had to pay £12 to park my car in addition to the entrance fee. When we eventually found the motorcycle display, we were very disappointed at the amount of bikes on show. It was quite obvious that a number of clubs were absent. We spoke to two club members who told us that the charge to rent the space for the displays was so expensive that a number of clubs were unable to afford the cost.

There were a large number of food and drink stalls and clothing outlets, etc, but we did not attend the NEC to buy food or drink or buy fashion clothing. I for one will not visit this 'show' again.
Graham Homer

Parking has always been expensive at the NEC, although bike parking is usually free. If taking a car, it's best to fill it with friends and share the cost. ***CBG***

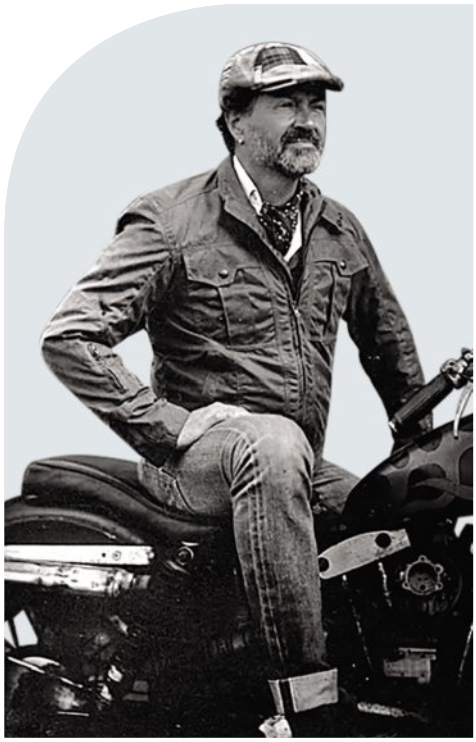
An electric future?

WHILE READING THE Grauniad I came across this quote from a professor of industrial strategy "...when battery prices come down in the mid-2020s there will be a tipping point when EVs can out-compete the internal combustion engine".

That is only eight years away; maybe sooner as electric cars are key to the government's industrial strategy. So presumably petrol stations and oil-derived products will become increasingly scarce, with a knock-on effect to services, skills and value of petrol driven vehicles.

Assuming this came to pass 'investing in recession-proof classics' might not be such a good long term plan. Should those committed to two wheels begin to look at electric bikes?
Rich

You're right. We're all doomed. Eventually. Possibly. In the near future, maybe not so near. Electric vehicles still have a very limited range. Their batteries rely on rare materials and have a relatively short life. We're okay for a little while yet. Bikes will be a better investment than most for a while, we think. Probably. ***CBG***



PAUL D'ORLÉANS

Meet the old school, same as the new school

Meditations on bobber origins

OVER AN EARLY-WINTER'S dinner this week (yes, I cook), warmed by candlelight and a fine Montrachet, my Anglo-French guest asked Suzie Heartbreak and me what we saw for motorcycles in 10 years' time? At my darkest – i.e. since the gloriously inverted 11/9 – the term 'future riders' conjures up the horsemen of the apocalypse, but we shouldn't let the eager polishing of a million jackboots blind us to the fact that life goes on regardless… until it doesn't, anyway. As with politics, so goes motorcycling, and if, like me, your head is full of history, you can't help but notice the big wheel of Samsara turning around, proving that everything new is old again.

I was delighted with the release of the new Triumph Bonneville and variants; they've managed genuine improvements on the new-echoes-old formula. But my morning meditation was disturbed on the introduction of Triumph's latest Lazarus trick, as the name – Bobber – nudged my mantra aside. That word rightfully belongs on the end of a fishing line, and is a lazy, cutesy, American lunkhead version of a historical custom motorcycle trend called the 'bob-job'.

But what's in a name? So very much… but defending language on the grounds of historical accuracy is like swordfighting with your television; you may win spectacularly, but the broadcast goes on.

So it's futile to battle historical revisionism, but since you – dear reader – actually read, I'll set the record straight. Let's go back a moment to the history of the American custom motorcycle; we didn't invent customisation, but we did invent the custom-as-trend, way back in the 1920s. Thus 'Oily' Karslake's Dreadnought, in the tender care of the VMCC, is rightfully called the first chopper (with a wink), and plenty of visionary tinkerers in the Noughts and 'Teens built amazing custom motorcycles, but they were all one-offs, and propagated no wave of imitators. The first popular (albeit still rare) custom motorcycle style in the US was the 'cut-down'. The cut-down is the Ur-custom style; all other American custom motorcycle trends branch from its hardy rootstock.

The basis of the cut-down was invariably an old Harley-Davidson 'J' series motorcycle, with an 'F-head' (inlet-over-exhaust) motor and a frame like stolen scaffolding. The inspiration was a familiar story; take your old, heavy, camel-handling street bike, and with a few weekends of hacksaw work, create a faster, lighter, fleet-handling new machine. The formula was straightforward, and the work accessible to any tool-handy rider with access to a barn's roster of equipment – hacksaw, blowlamp, hammer, block-and-tackle. The top frame tubes were cut at the seat post, bent downwards for a lower profile, and the rear subframe shortened up too. The fuel tank was tinsnipped to fit, the front fender ditched, the rear fender released of its tail section, the muffler tossed, and voilà, you've 'cut down' your old workhorse into a very modern, streamlined shape.

The cut-down style was copied all over the US, and instructions on how to modify your Harley 'J' chassis were published in magazines like *Popular Mechanics* by the late 1920s. It was the first instance of 'customer feedback' influencing the design of factory machines, as the cut-down style soon became the silhouette of American motorcycling, with shorter frames, a lower ride height, and streamlined tanks.

Production bikes didn't get lighter though, the opposite in fact, and increases in power were paired with more robust frames and forks, fatter wheels, and heavier fenders. But it was the outline of the cut-down which influenced, the vibe of a sleek, low, modern machine. Thus on its 1936 introduction, the Harley-Davidson Model EL Knucklehead was clearly influenced by the cut-down in styling, but the factory's first overhead-valve V-twin production motor was considerably slower than those customs influencing its design.

Harley-Davidson's previous hot bike, the Model JDH of 1928/9, was the pinnacle of tuning savvy for the F-head motor. The JDH was the last of the old-school Harley-Davidsons… although looking at one today, they never actually enrolled in a new school. Until diligent tuners really got to work on the Knucklehead, its extra weight and timid tuning meant a cut-down JDH remained the fastest street bike in the US through the 1940s. Which is why cut-downs were soon outlawed from racing competition, as the AMA changed the rules of racing to encourage low-bucks track time, with only factory catalogued machines allowed on sanctioned race venues. Thus the cut-down was original 'outlaw' bike, as riders kept racing their hot machines in non-AMA-sanctioned, or outlaw, venues. That term ran away from its origins postwar and shaded the American custom scene with dark overtones, which was embraced by riders who liked a little menace with their motorcycling, and the media, who love an excuse to play Chicken Little.

Next month, I'll discuss how the cut-down became the bob-job… CBG

'My morning meditation was disturbed on the introduction of Triumph's latest Lazarus trick, as the name – Bobber – nudged my mantra aside…'

WHO IS PAUL D'ORLÉANS?

Paul d'Orleans is a writer, artist, sartorialist and photographer. He's best known as The Vintagent for his long-running blog and judges concours such as the Quail and Villa d'Este, consults for Bonhams auctions, shoots digital and tintype photographs, and is curating an exhibit on café racers at the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum.

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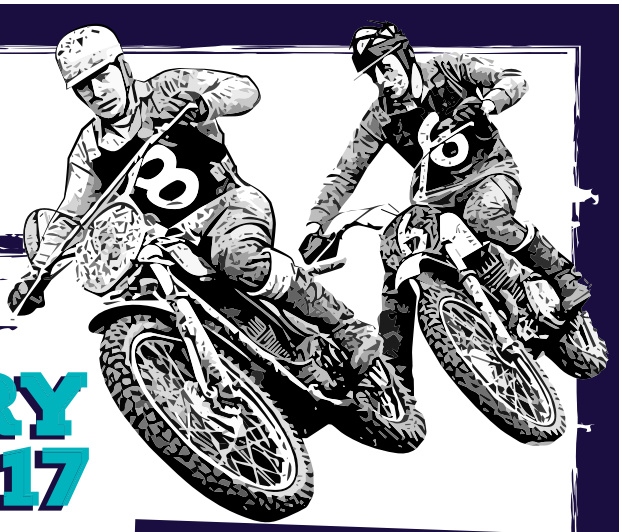

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MARK **WILLIAMS**

Is British best?

Thrice bitten and thrice almost shy, Williams is seriously considering abandoning his Oriental habits

AS WE ALL know, the classic world is roughly divided between those who love Japanese machinery and those who don't. In my long and stellar career as a motorcycling know-all, I've rarely encountered those who ride, restore and/or collect both, and despite my vast knowledge of human nature, I've never figured out why. The old saw that we crave to re-live our biking youth by owning the machines that enabled it isn't even a reliable guide here, for I know lots of folks – myself included – who were weaned on British marques but won't now touch them with a bargepole.

In some cases I reckon that's because their unreliability, limited performance and the maintenance required to keep them going compared most unfavourably with the jewel-like machines coming out of Japan, at least relatively speaking. So we and our loyalties jumped ship and as committed baby-boomers, we've never looked any further back.

Recent experiences with Japanese models that are a good 15 to 20 years younger than the British bikes I owned prior to my Damascene conversion are, however, making me question the wisdom of my prejudice. And like most other matters motorcycling, this process has been informed if not enhanced by the far greater wisdom of Mr Editor Westworth.

Engaging in some typical email banter with him recently, he roughly itemised the cost of rebuilding the BSA B25SS he'd just finished (more or less, because they never really are). Having followed his progress of so doing, albeit in Another Magazine, I was much surprised at the modesty of the final sum, at least compared with the costs involved in owning, and admittedly in customising two of the three 1980s Hondas that sit somewhat truculently in my workshop. After I'd moaned about this disparity – I'm nothing if not a little ray of sunshine in the wallet department – Frank pointed out that he'd "never build a bike I didn't want… certainly wouldn't expend pounds and hours on one. In your shoes I'd pick up something with easy spares availability… and a decent margin between cost/sale price".

Well of course I did really want the bikes in question, and partly for the aforementioned nostalgic reasons, but in answer to his further point about "knowing what one's limits are", this is because I know far, far more about Jap and to a lesser extent Italian bikes than about Brits. But his contention about spares availability and value prompted a little, ultimately troubling research.

For example, the Yamaha XS-2 I bought brand new in 1972 was light years ahead of the equivalent Triumph T120 in terms of engineering design, power output, electrics and reliability – even if its handling wasn't (but that could be fixed, and in my case, was). But as even a cursory interweb trawl revealed, to run one now would likely be a far more expensive proposition than owning the Bonnie.

For example, a set of clutch plates for the Triumph can be had for £30, which for the Yam would be £59. Swinging arm bushes for the Trumpet are £12, for the Yam £24, prices for a pattern front fender are approx £23 versus £47, for a piston £82 versus £110, for piston rings £30 versus £58… and so on and on it goes.

I don't actually have much ambition to own an XS-2 again, but I have been musing about another ohc Yamaha, the long-lived SR500 which first appeared in 1974 and in other guises right up until last year. Its obvious contemporaneous rival was BSA's badge-engineered B50SS, the bigger and almost identical brother of the bike Frank had just spannered back to life, but with a leaky, push-rodded engine that was impossible to ride above 60mph without threatening your dental work (I know: I owned its predecessor, a B44 Victor – much to my dentist's dismay).

But if you decide to restore the Yam, you'll need £57 to buy a rectifier, compared with £32 for the Beezer, 140 quid plus £80 carriage to get a pattern exhaust system from the US compared with £49 for the BSA here, and should your seat have rotted away, only in America can you buy a quality replacement, and for £207 plus £35 postage, whereas a B50 UK-sourced item can be had for a 'mere' £75.

Now, as with all the Jap bikes I've owned these last 15 years, the answer to the spares availability/cost dilemma is to go second-hand, and thus it is that a growing network of specialist breakers has emerged, several of which I regularly patronise. For example, a brand new replacement starter motor for my CB400N is available, again from the US, for £125 plus shipping, but instead I went for a used one which cost £30, but even after de-corroding and painting, it didn't work and the vendor refused to replace it, so I had to buy another one, also £30, wasting further time, money and agg. And I could cite many other examples of this odious trial'n'error approach to keeping 40+ year-old Japanese bikes working right and looking good.

So maybe the worm is turning. Maybe even despite my general ignorance I should make my next project, if indeed there is one, a Brit bike. So all I need now is a giant leap of faith… and an extensive, if expensive, Imperial toolkit. CBG

'Maybe despite my general ignorance I should make my next project, if indeed there is one, a Brit bike. So all I need now is a giant leap of faith…'

WHO IS MARK WILLIAMS?

Williams is a serial motorbicycle magazine junkie, having published, launched and edited *Bike, Which Bike?* and *Motorcycle International* among others. This means he's tested, ridden and even owned more bikes than is probably good for him

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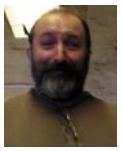

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PAUL MILES

Winter wobbles

Who'd want to ride a motorcycle in the winter?

IT'S COLD, IT'S dark, it's wet, there might be leaves on the road, fallen branches and black ice. Throw into the mix mobile-wielding drivers with attention spans to trouble even the most geriatric goldfish, steamy windows and suicidal pedestrians… so who'd want to ride a motorcycle in the winter? Especially a classic motorcycle? For fun? We must be mad, but you already know that; a bit odd, us motorcyclists.

But, I've noticed what appears to be a new phenomenon starting to appear over the last few years. Back in the day, whenever that day actually was, I had but one motorcycle. It was my bike, the bike. If I was riding to work, it was on the bike. I took the bike on holiday and rode the bike when out with mates on a Sunday morning thrash. Life was simpler, then – one bike, one choice.

Now, though, I have a garage full of motorcycles, some of them even work, theoretically, at least. Many of you who mistakenly stumble across this column will find themselves in a similar position, owning several bikes, some of them nice. Other readers might still own just the one motorcycle. Lucky you, read the second paragraph again before going out to enjoy your ride. For the rest of us, we multiple motorcycle owners, here's the latest first-world problem – is it possible to own too many bikes?

Forget the T-shirts that insist the ideal number of bikes to be *n*+1, where *n* is the number of machines one currently possesses; the reality is something quite different. Seemingly all summer I spend precious riding time ferrying a succession of old clunkers to the MoT station, picking up bits for them and scrabbling around in the workshop ensuring they remain road-ready at a moment's notice.

My modern bike (for I always have one) sits patiently, utterly ignored and oblivious to all this shed chaos whirling around it. If I'm riding to the coast, just like I used to as a lad with my mates to buy beer, except now it's to buy lunch for my daughters, I'll spend far too long fettling some leaky old nail in readiness for the trip. The journey itself will take at least twice as long as it could have and I'll arrive smothered in oil and smelling of petrol. Why not take the modern machine? It doesn't even occur to me.

But, cometh the darkness, cometh the modern. One touch button starting, anti-lock brakes, laser-like headlights, heated grips! Yes, this is the time for the newer bike. And every year without fail the scales fall from my eyes and I realise just how good a new bike can be. I talk with my friends, we meet for a coffee having ridden there on modern bikes, we all think the same thing. The conversation then steers inevitably towards that darkest of places – perhaps I should get rid of some of my old bikes. It's never 'sell' or 're-align', it's always *get rid*, which sounds so final, like crossing some kind of petrochemical Styx.

I go home and regard the array of what I laughingly term classic bikes before resolving to ride them through the winter – all of them. But, when it comes to actually smothering my very best bikes with axle grease before attempting to kick them through 50W oil that's turned to treacle in the cold weather, my resolve waivers. Throw into the mix that's it's going to be dark five minutes after I've finished eating lunch and six-Volts' worth of 80 year-old lighting is completely the wrong sort of Miller time and suddenly the Honda is looking ever more attractive. So, I play the game. You do, too, we all do. I look at the assembled throng the way a turkey farmer does in December and try to decide what gets the chop.

Next year I will have fewer bikes, spend more time riding, simplify my life, etc. But what to keep? I only 'need' one prewar bike, surely? Most postwar British twins are just variations on a theme, so any one will do, perhaps two, although I'm very fond of the A10. So, it's decided, I need a pre-unit twin, a unit twin, a 500/650 and 750, a special or two, obviously, plus several, okay all, of the prewar bikes.

I perform this ritual every year, governed by the changing seasons like an oily druid. Nothing is ever sold; it just gets moved around a bit. Occasionally, one of my friends steps up and actually gets rid of a bike. 90% of the time it's me who buys it, compounding my problems.

So I ride the Honda and occasionally drag out some long-suffering clunker that deserves a better retirement than being subjected to a midwinter London commute, but there it is. Now, I'm clean out of axle grease, I wonder if… ahh, lard! CBG

'The journey itself will take at least twice as long as it could have and I'll arrive smothered in oil and smelling of petrol…'

WHO IS PAUL MILES?

Paul Miles is a lifelong Londoner who rides every day and regards a prewar classic as perfectly suited to urban commuting. A contact lens specialist by profession, he nowadays appears to be a full-time rider, breaker and fixer of old bikes. Entirely fails to understand the concept of patina or winter lay-ups.

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VEE TWO'S Dreambike

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART PHOTOS BY PHIL HAWKINS

It looks, rides, steers and stops like an iconic bevel-drive Ducati from the 1973 factory race shop. Except it's not. It's new…

POWERED BY..
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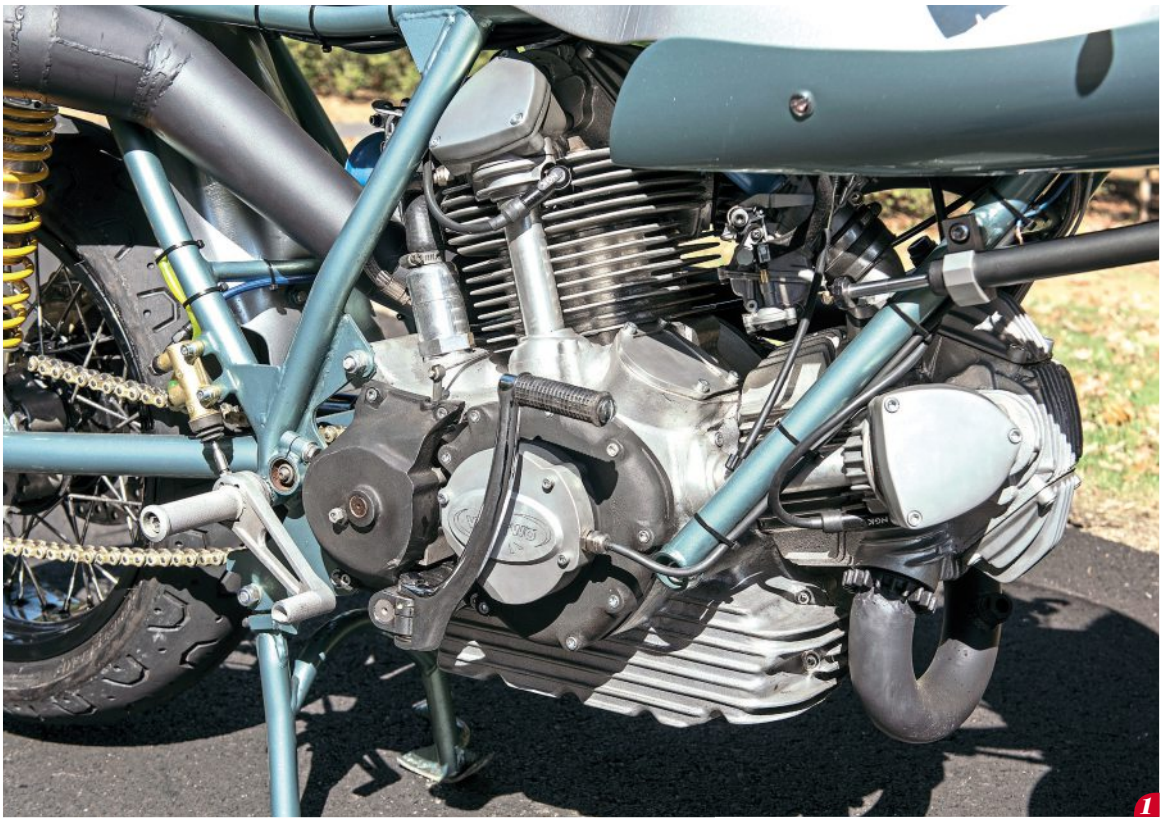
Visitors to last October's Barber Vintage Festival might have been pardoned for thinking they were seeing double when viewing the bikes on display for the annual *Motorcycle Classics* Concours.

For there, gleaming in the Alabama sunshine, were not just one but two examples of the bike that's widely recognised as being the most iconic, the most valuable, and simply the most desirable Ducati production streetbike yet made, ever since the Italian manufacturer began selling V-twin motorcycles back in 1971.

Just 401 examples of the green-framed 750SS were built in the Bologna factory's race shop in 1973-74 – Ducati's first customer desmo V-twin, and a close replica with lights and a horn of the factory racer Paul Smart had taken to victory in the 1972 Imola 200, even down to the lugs in the chassis for the centrestand. 750SS values have skyrocketed in recent years, with prices of those sold recently at auction regularly exceeding £100,000, and rising. And here were two of them on display at America's premier historic bike occasion – with a third in the Barber Museum next door. Common as mud – not!



But wait – all is not what it seemed. One of the bikes on display was equipped with modern Öhlins suspension and Brembo radial brakes, plus it was subtly different in its shorter-wheelbase stance from the older original 1974 motorcycle alongside it. This was a brand new motorcycle on which the paint was still drying, having been completed the previous week in Western Australia and flown to Alabama to make its global debut at Barber Vintage. The Vee Two Ducati Imola Evo is the creation of the world's leading Ducati bevel-drive engine specialist, Vee Two Australia, which is now finally able to make its founder Brook Henry's dreams of building his own engine from the ground up come true.

First, though, it's disclaimer time. Two decades ago Vee Two Australia sponsored my personal roadracing activities for four years all over the world, both on desmo V-twins, which Brook Henry himself built and tuned, and my own Ducati Supermono. Together we won heaps of races, headed by the Australian TT at Bathurst and the Daytona Formula 750 and SoS events, plus we took the 1996 BEARS World Series title on the Vee Two Bimota DB2R, and twice finished runner-up in the European Supermono championship run as a support class to the World Superbike series, first to the factory Rotax entry, then the following season to the semi-works Over Yamaha from Japan. We'd have got our own back by winning the J2V-BoTT race at Tsukuba in Japan as well, had I not crashed the Vee Two Ducati 900SS on the last lap while in a secure lead. Oops! I think Brook has forgiven me for that – but during our racing partnership my eldest son Andrew got to know him well, and today he is Vee Two Australia's CEO and his partner in the business at the company's headquarters in Nannup, three hours south of Perth. End of disclaimer!

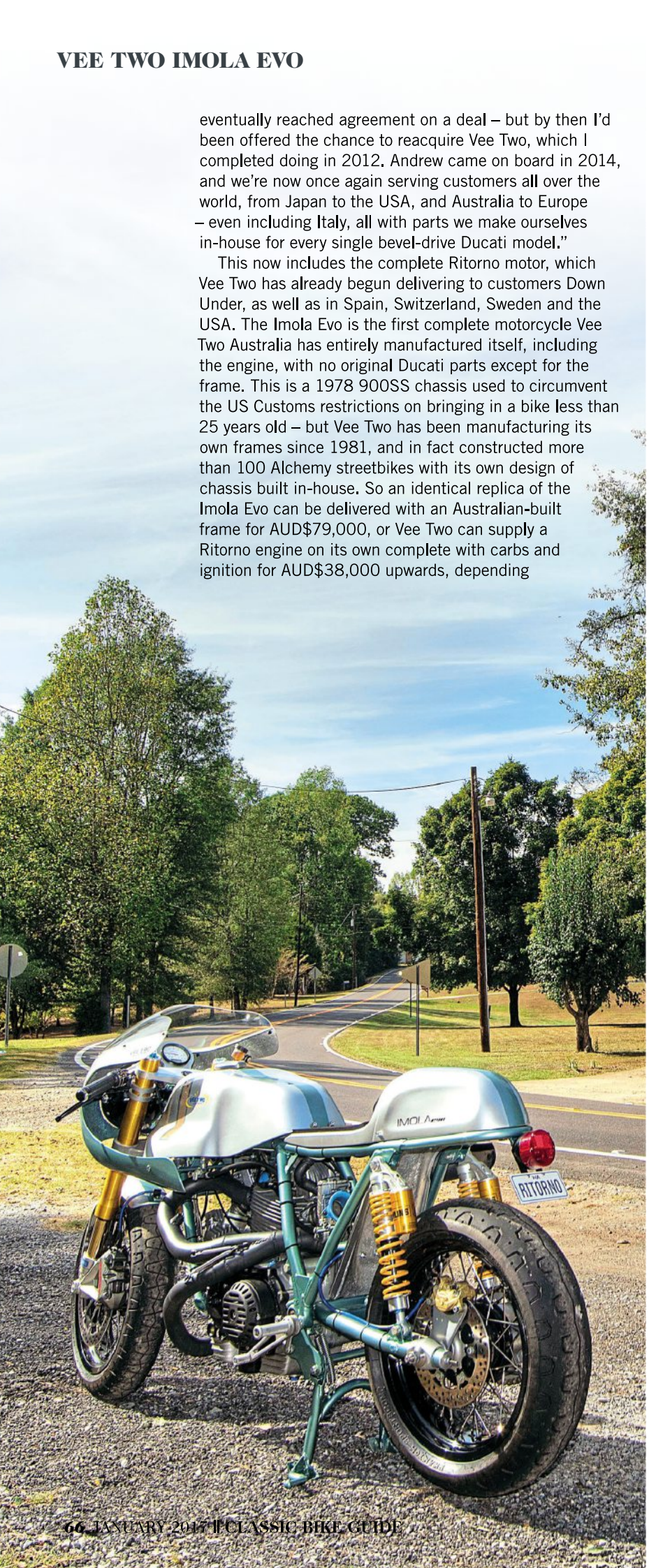
Back to the Imola Evo streetbike, which represents the fulfilment of a long-term objective for NZ-born Brook. "I started Vee Two Australia in 1980 with the express intention of building my own desmo V-twin engine," he says. "But as time went by the business expanded, and by 2000 I was employing 28 people and had no time to do this. Then I sold the company, moved to Nannup, and started negotiating with the gentleman who had acquired all the factory patterns and drawings for the engine that Mike Hailwood used to win his comeback TT race in 1978. We ➧

1: Ducati's big bevel-drivers have long been objects of admiration – and not a little performance. A 2016 version; enhanced, improved

2, 3 & 4: The engines are built to Ducati's original drawings, and are improved by modern materials and much else – the finished item shows this. There's also a spin-off oil filter; a handy addition

eventually reached agreement on a deal – but by then I'd been offered the chance to reacquire Vee Two, which I completed doing in 2012. Andrew came on board in 2014, and we're now once again serving customers all over the world, from Japan to the USA, and Australia to Europe – even including Italy, all with parts we make ourselves in-house for every single bevel-drive Ducati model."

This now includes the complete Ritorno motor, which Vee Two has already begun delivering to customers Down Under, as well as in Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and the USA. The Imola Evo is the first complete motorcycle Vee Two Australia has entirely manufactured itself, including the engine, with no original Ducati parts except for the frame. This is a 1978 900SS chassis used to circumvent the US Customs restrictions on bringing in a bike less than 25 years old – but Vee Two has been manufacturing its own frames since 1981, and in fact constructed more than 100 Alchemy streetbikes with its own design of chassis built in-house. So an identical replica of the Imola Evo can be delivered with an Australian-built frame for AUD$79,000, or Vee Two can supply a Ritorno engine on its own complete with carbs and ignition for AUD$38,000 upwards, depending on the specification. "We can go from 750cc up to 1100cc and maybe even higher, each with various levels of tune," says Brook. "It's all down to the customer to decide."



I've personally owned and raced three different original 750SS green-frame Ducatis down the years, ever since buying my first one new in 1974, and the one I still have today is apparently the last such bike still being raced anywhere in the world – when it's not being paraded by Paul Smart, like at this year's Phillip Island Classic, or at Imola in 2012 on the 40th anniversary of his 200-miler victory there. So even without the family connection I was particularly interested to ride the Vee Two Imola Evo, which thanks to Barber Museum management I was able to demo for a handful of laps in the lunch break of the two Barber Vintage Festival racedays. Later the following week I also rode it for 80 miles/130km along some of the great biking roads in the hills of Alabama – enough to get a good feel for what is a glorious anomaly, combining ancient with modern, blending the way it was with how it is today. Yin and yang, desmo style…

The 992cc air-cooled sohc 94 x 71.5mm desmo V-twin engine powering the Imola Evo is an identical copy externally of Hailwood's 1978 TT-winning Ducati engine, built around gravity-fed sandcast crankcases made from the same original factory moulds almost 40 years on, but with modern materials. These are different from Ducati's original 1971 V-twin design because they have a spin-on oil filter on the underside, and come with significant extra webbing around the crankshaft to strengthen the bottom end.

"This was Taglioni's second generation V-twin motor, which he designed after discovering what the weaknesses of the original round-case design were, so he fixed all of those problems in this version," Brook says.

Both plain bearing and roller bearing crankshafts are available. The crank fitted to the Imola Evo is a roller version, because Vee Two had not finished longevity tests on its own design of high pressure oil pump needed for the plain bearing bottom end before building the bike to send to Alabama. The same design of Vee Two's own steel conrods that I raced with so successfully are fitted here, carrying high compression flat-top pistons specially manufactured for Vee Two by Giorgio Casolari at Pistal Racing in Italy. These combine with the bathtub combustion chambers of the reworked cylinder heads, which have been ported and flowed by Vee Two to produce a high 13.5:1 compression ratio. Vee Two stainless steel nimonic valves are fitted, with 45mm inlets – one each per cylinder, of course – fed by 41mm Keihin flatslide carbs and matched to 40mm exhausts, each operated by Vee Two's own design of desmo camshaft; ground in-house. Thousands of these have been sold since Brook designed it in 2003 for the dual spark DS1000 motor used in the Monster, Multistrada and Supersport, with a higher 11.5mm lift and longer duration than the factory cam.

The Imola Evo features twin-plug heads sparked by an Elektronik-Sachse programmable contactless digital ignition that was specially made in Germany

for Vee Two, with a linear advance curve and a 12V lithium-ion battery hidden beneath the fuel tank, with twin coils. "Dual spark has the advantage of a faster burn rate in the combustion chamber, especially with a two-valve *desmodue* engine like this where you can't get the sparkplug in the middle of the combustion chamber because of physical restrictions with the oversize valves," says Brook. "Running a twin-plug head lets you get the spark in the right place for extra performance."

The exhaust that is fitted is a traditional Vee Two through-the-frame two-into-one system, which is the spare exhaust for the bike I won the Formula 750 race on at Daytona in 1995. It didn't sound overly loud riding it through the streets of small Alabama hill towns – but Vee Two has delivered hundreds of bikes fitted with street-legal silenced versions of this system. "We can produce a performance exhaust which will allow any customer to pass the noise tests in their own country," says Andrew Cathcart. "Every bike we deliver is a bespoke motorcycle, made to suit its owner's needs and desires."

Above: You knew instantly that this was a Ducati – right? So did we. We were all wrong. It's something even more exclusive

Below: Stripping the bike back a little reveals the basic strength and simplicity of Ducati's frame. Light, low and long, only improved by the modern suspenders

The five-speed gearbox fitted to the Imola Evo features standard Ducati ratios, but together with the dry clutch it is entirely manufactured by Vee Two, which also offers a close-ratio race version, if preferred. The clutch plates are made by Rimoldi in Italy, and together with the stiffened springs they deliver the substantially increased horsepower from the Vee Two motor to the road. How much more? 122bhp at the rear wheel at 8500rpm, according to Brook, with 95ft/lb of torque peaking at just over 5000 revs – compared to the 87bhp at 9000rpm delivered at the rear wheel by Mike Hailwood's smaller-capacity 883cc TT-winner. "With these cams we have a very flat torque curve, but the reason I chose these bore and stroke dimensions is because I want the engine to rev out," says Brook. "It's safe to run it to over 10,000rpm, and there's very little drop-off in power beyond the 8500-rev power peak, in case you want to hold a gear between bends to save a couple of gearchanges."

Yet as I found for myself, both riding it on the track at Barber and later on the Alabama highways, it's not so much the over-rev that seduces you when riding the Imola Evo, more the lovely waves of torque that make this a traditional first generation Ducati V-twin on steroids. Thanks to the high compression ratio and flatslide carbs, acceleration is vivid but controllable – the pick-up from a closed throttle isn't excessively fierce, just crisp. But then, as revs rise, there's a fabulous sense of muscular motion, which justifies Brook's decision to retain the wider stock gear ratios.

The clutch lever is quite stiff thanks to the heavy-duty springs needed to harness this enhanced engine performance, but this isn't a bike you're going to commute to work on through traffic, so it's quite acceptable for Racer Road. Anyway, with the high gearing it's best to leave it in second gear and ride through towns off the cam to minimise noise pollution, in which case the clean throttle response and smooth carburation worthy of a fuel-injected motorcycle won't have the engine spitting back on part throttle, nor is there any transmission snatch. It's all too civilised – albeit a little unexpectedly.

Hit the high road and that wonderful engine comes into its own, with the rolling sound of thunder echoing behind your right shoulder through the 2-1 exhaust. There's strong, fluid acceleration that'll lighten the front wheel from 3000 revs upwards, with absolutely no steps in the power curve as you head towards the 8800rpm shift point that I'd made my own personal redline on the ultra-readable multi-function Motogadget

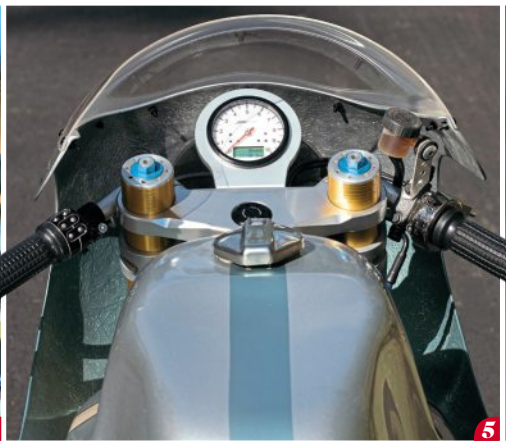
1: The stuff of Ducati myth. The spider trapped forever inside the fuel-sighting strip in the tank is artificial, not organic. Not like that race bike all those years ago…

2: Front end is well up to controlling the big twin's performance, keeping the rubber stuck to the road, while the Brembo brakes could haul down a supertanker

3: A monster machine with everything. Manly black exhausts, lots and lots of fins and blue bellmouths. Impossible to ask for more

4: Although Vee Two can supply its own brand new frames to house its brand new engines, this one's originally from a Ducati, a 900SS

5: Look! No satnav! No cell phone holder! This will so never catch on



instrument, here replacing my 750SS racer's ubiquitous white-faced Veglia tacho. It inevitably felt uncannily like that racebike to ride, but with extra grunt, meaning that I usually short-shifted around 7000 revs out on the highway, which put me back in the fat part of that meaty torque curve. Really, this is a proper old-school Ducati V-twin, but with modern manners – the best of both worlds, old and new.

However, even more than the motor, that dictum applies in reverse to the Evo's handling, which embraces modern technology presented in a traditional way – and here I'll willingly admit to falling victim to Proud Dad Syndrome. For this motorcycle was conceived and created by No. 1 son Andrew Cathcart, using his years of experience wrenching our 750SS for me in Historic racing.

"I've always enjoyed taking the essence of a classic motorcycle and subtly modernising it, using new components and current technology to give it improved performance, without sacrificing the spirit of the original," says AC2. "So as soon as we knew we'd be manufacturing the Ritorno engine at Vee Two, I decided we should build a motorcycle around that motor which would show it off to advantage. I know we have many customers who long to own their own green-frame 750SS, but either can't find one or couldn't afford it if they did. In creating the Imola Evo we've given them the chance of owning one for around half the price, but with more performance and improved handling. It's a reinterpretation of Ducati's most famous model, not an outright copy, which we'd never do – that would be dishonest. But this way you have the best of both worlds – classic allure with modern performance." Good boy – I couldn't have put it better myself…

To create the prototype Imola Evo, Andrew took a period 900SS chassis for reasons already explained, though Vee Two has a huge stock of original frames, so, where necessary, future examples can have similar chassis to aid homologation, otherwise they will come equipped with brand new frames (either twin-shock or monoshock) made on the Vee Two frame jigs. He then modified the chassis geometry fairly extensively to effectively change where the engine sits in the frame relative to the wheelbase, by rotating the frame lengthways around the engine. He did this by fitting a pair of longer Öhlins 36PL piggyback gas shocks that are fully-adjustable, same as the Swedish suspension sultans' FG511 43mm upside-down fork, which is shorter anyway, and which he's pulled through the yokes by 40mm. This, of course, drops the nose of the bike and lifts the tail, which together with the rider sitting much further forward thanks to shortening the long 17-litre fuel tank by 110mm, results in both sharper steering geometry and an increased load on the front wheel. There's a 49/51% weight distribution compared to the original 750SS's stretched 1500mm footprint, and a 47/53% rearwards weight bias.

Positioning the seat further forward and shortening the tank not only helps with loading up the front end but also gives a more modern, better proportioned appearance – a fact confirmed just by comparing old and new bikes. Vee Two's bodywork specialist Brett Hilton deserves a special pat on the back for the way he's accomplished this, in retaining the original model's timeless appeal, but in a modern context, topped off by the considerably more effective US-made 7in JW Speaker Model 8700 Evolution 2 headlight with dual LED lenses. Brett's handiwork ➧

6: Motogadget supplies many of the tricky electrical gubbins, including the only slightly confusing switchgear and the entirely excellent bar-end indicators

7: Öhlins control the bike's back end bounce, also. And yes, even a serious bit of racer kit like this boasts a centrestand. This is the relentless march of progress

8: Family fortunes. Alan Cathcart talks to Andrew Cathcart, while Brook Henry stands between them, moderating perhaps

includes the spider displayed in the clear sighting strip of the fuel tank – just as Daytona Superbike race winner Cook Neilson's Ducati 750SS had when it arrived from Italy, except of course this one just had to be an Australian redback! Relax, animal lovers, no spiders were hurt in the making of this motorcycle – it's 'just' a cleverly applied sticker…

As soon as you come to sit aboard the Imola Evo you realise how different it is from its Seventies' ancestor. From five steps away it looks like a 750SS with modern brakes and suspension. But just throwing a leg over it tells you at once that this is an optical illusion, because it's shorter, lower and definitely smaller overall than its rangier ancestor. You must still stand on tiptoe to throw a leg over the taller seat, but once aboard, the riding position is much more compact without being cramped. It's actually more comfortable than the stretched-out stance of the original bike, even though your hands are consciously lower when gripping the bars, without making the bike more tiring to ride via the extra

weight on your arms and shoulders. The 1460mm wheelbase is 40mm shorter than that of the 750SS, and the steering geometry is sharper, too, with a 25° effective rake for the Öhlins fork compared to 30° on Smart's Imola 200-winner or my 750SS, with 99mm of trail.

These are modern sportbike numbers and the result is considerably more agile steering on the Imola Evo, compared to my classic racer's hyper-stable but also heavy-steering handling, where it's been a long-time joke that you must send it a telegram when you want to change direction. The brand new Vee Two bike is a product of the internet era – send it a text message instead, and see how it switches from side to side through the fast fourth gear Barber chicane after the museum in a way you can only describe as nimble.

Yet at the same time, the Imola Evo hasn't lost any of the older bike's legendary stability around fast, taxing turns, maybe with a bump in the middle.

Below: The Vee Two also makes one seriously credible street machine

Back then, you always looked forward to these on a Ducati, knowing that the faster Japanese fours would be wriggling and squirming as you motored serenely past them one gear higher, with wheels securely in line. Even with limited suspension travel back then, you could rely on the extra weight of what was quite a heavy bike for a V-twin to make it sit down well over bumps and ripples, whereas here the Imola Evo has the extra compliance of the modern Öhlins suspension, with the huge choice of settings this conveys, also resulting in improved ride quality. That's partly because Andrew had chosen quite a soft set-up, especially at the front, but this was good for riding on the sometimes variable road surfaces of the Alabama hill country. That said, if I'd been doing more than a handful of laps each day at Barber, I'd definitely have stiffened up the fork.

That's because the only real criticism I have of the Vee Two Imola Evo's handling straight out of the box – and remember, I was the first person to get it into second gear – is that it is overbraked in the way it is set up at present. The twin 320mm Brembo floating steel discs with forged Monoblock four-piston radial calipers are just too fierce for a bike like this, even one producing 122bhp and weighing 168kg dry. I came very close to locking the front wheel twice at Barber, and after that I treated the adjustable brake lever with heaps of respect. While the big front discs look great and are über-purposeful, I wouldn't like to ride this bike in the rain the way it is right now, and smaller discs or some attention to the lever ratio are called for. As it is, the soft fork settings deliver quite a bit of front end dive at present – though maybe that's a positive factor in helping the Imola Evo steer so well. Ah, set-up – it's all a matter of trade-offs!

A word here for the bike's Pirelli Phantom Sportscomp tyres fitted to the great-looking 17in Akront wire-spoked rims. This rubber looks very period but has excellent modern properties in terms of feel and grip. The round shape of the 180/55-17 rear helps with the steering, providing a nice progressive rate of turn from side to side, while also putting down the power well. To be honest, I didn't expect to like these tyres as much as I did.

The Vee Two Ducati Imola Evo is a truly authentic ride down memory lane, and when Brook completes development of the electric start version of the Ritorno motor, as he says he'll be doing imminently, it's going to be as practical as it's already drop-dead desirable. This is a very, very good motorcycle – okay, take that with a pinch of salt if you wish, but I know that when someone else besides me with any degree of experience rides this bike, that'll be his or her opinion too. As dispassionately as I can manage, I have to say the boy did good. Well done, Andrew – and Brook too, of course! CBG

Above: Modern lighting in a trad-pattern racer half-fairing is seriously effective, as is the way with modern lamps. So yes, it is even possible to ride rapidly in the dark

Below: Father and son contemplate the latter's creation following the former's ride. Did Sir Alan enjoy the ride? Was he filled with compliment or complaint? We will never know, although we can guess...

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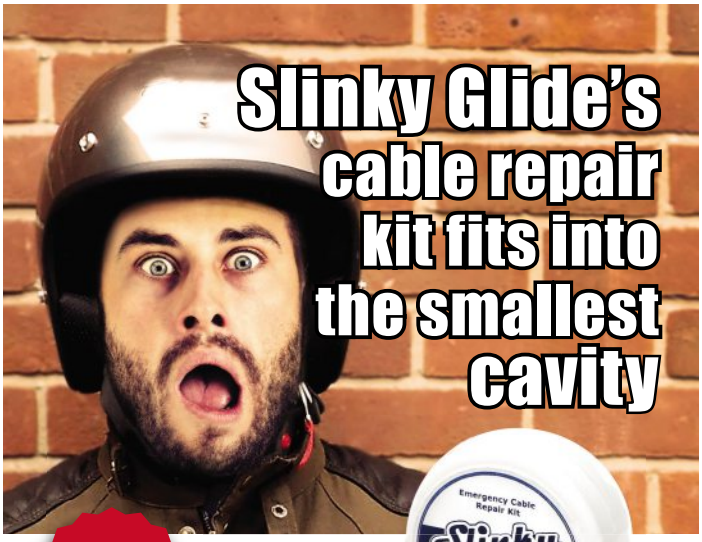

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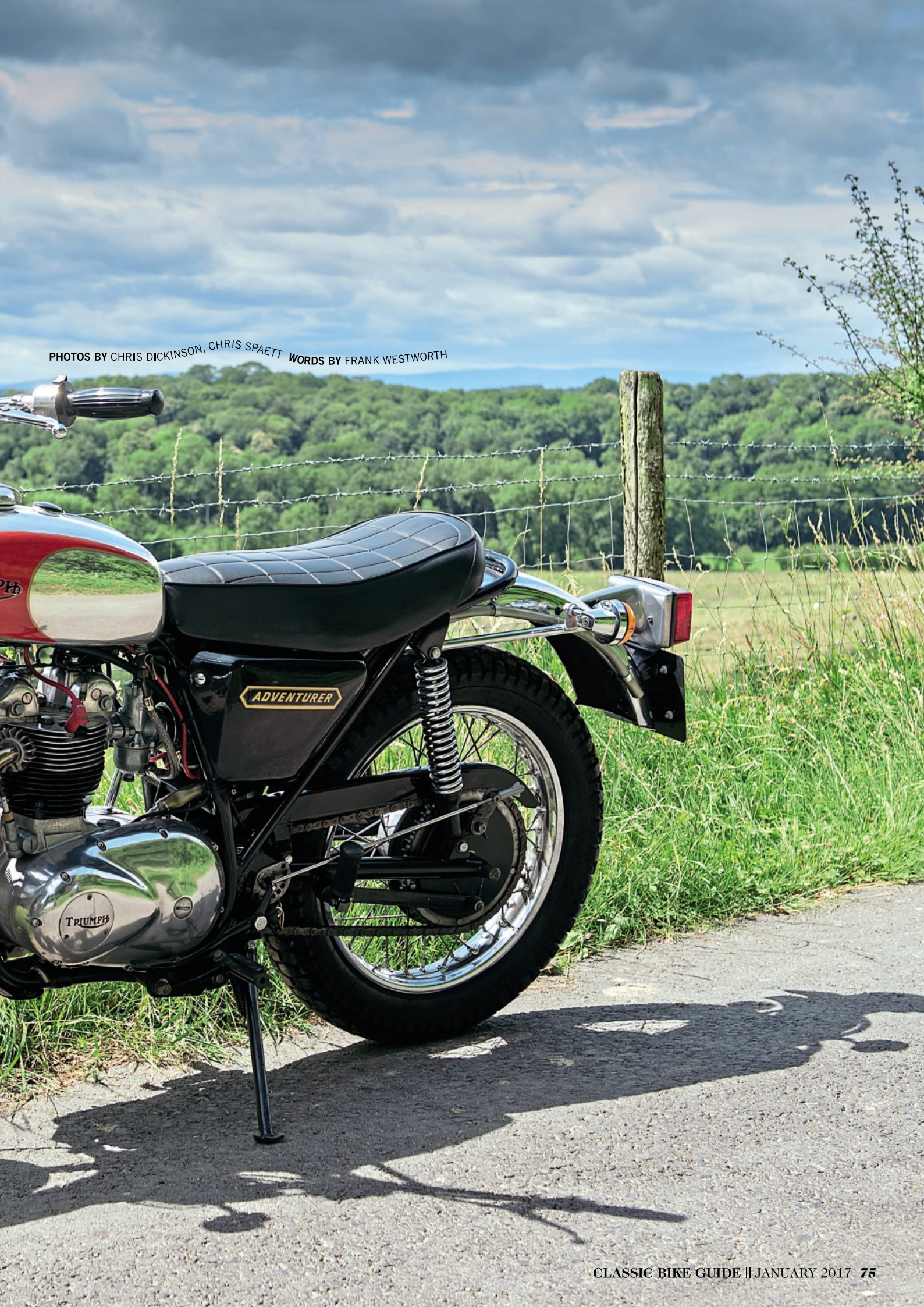
Go for it!

For adventure, that is. The first Triumph to carry the name Adventurer was a light 500 twin, good for pretty much anything adventurous…



PHOTOS BY CHRIS DICKINSON, CHRIS SPAETT ***WORDS BY*** FRANK WESTWORTH

TRIUMPH TR5T ADVENTURER

A minor puzzle in the classic motorcycling world – at least for yrstrly – has been the popularity of Triumph's twin engines when compared with the BSA equivalents. Although it is true that they do what they do in slightly different ways, what they actually deliver is very similar. At least, that is the case with the 650s; it's less so with the 500s, although it's not easy to pin down the mechanical reasons behind that.

BSA, on the other hand, faced no competition from its Triumph stablemates when it came to single-cylinder machines, and although there is an argument which claims that all the unit-construction BSA singles from 1958's C15 Star all the way through until 1972's B50 were derived from a Triumph design – the Terrier – it is the BSA-badged versions which are the most well known. And the development was a BSA Small Heath project, not a Triumph Meriden effort.

BSA achieved monster competition success with its unit singles in the 1960s – awesome riders like the inimitable Jeff Smith proving just how powerful they were on the rough stuff – and while the engines were rarely adventurous in the engineering department, they were robust, reliable and delivered enough poke – until more modern peaky strokers interrupted things. The comp bikes' frames were also clever, finally proving the old adage that racing improves the breed by providing the inspiration behind the last generation of roadster bicycles built specifically for the over-developed single-pot engines, the 1971 design which carried the engine's lube inside its main tubes – a practice followed by the comp singles for a couple of years before them.

BSA's 1971 road range included two singles: a 250 and a 500, the former being a willing – if over-stretched – little animal, while the latter offered more performance (34bhp over the 250's 26 or so), it also required some serious determination to kick into life. A short kickstart lever, a tall first gear and a 10.5:1 compression ratio all played their part in this. Even at the time, when BSA's target rider was presumably both young and fit, many wondered why they'd decided against slotting one of their twin engines into what was in fact a light and generally excellent bicycle. Especially given that only the 650 twins appeared in the oil-bearing duplex frame introduced at the same time. The common view was that the light frame wasn't strong enough for the heavier engine. Which does seem unlikely.

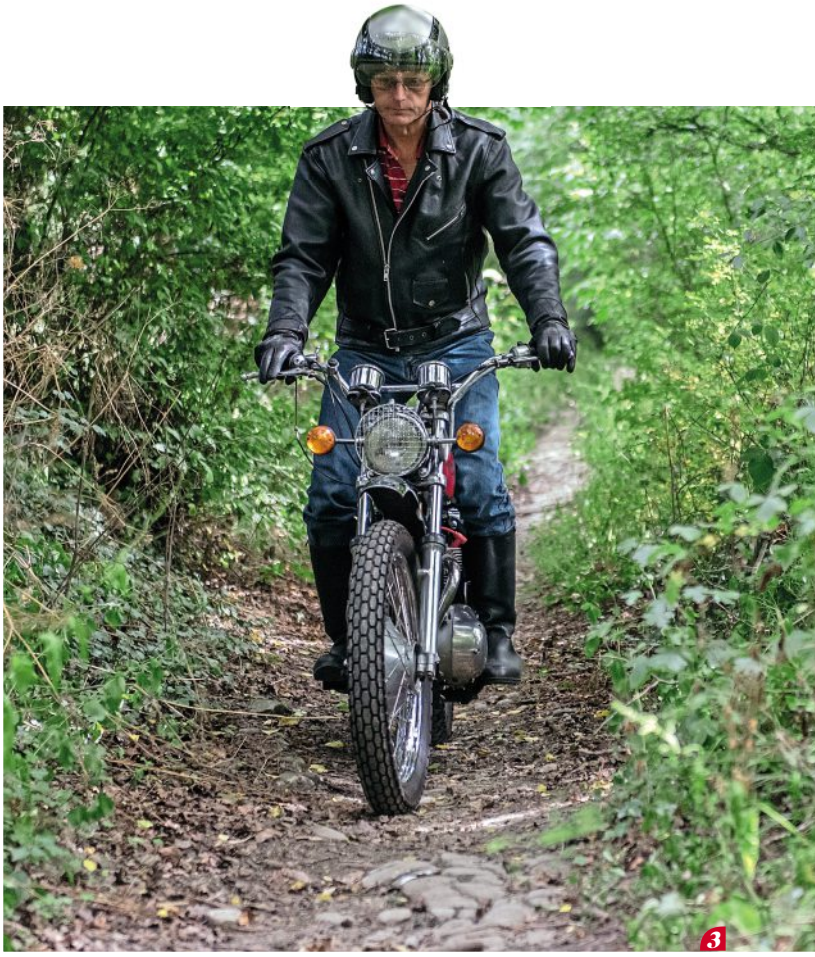
Above: Adventurer by name; at home in nature. This is a perfect bike for the more gentle forms of off-road riding

Below: Triumph 500 engine sits high in a frame designed for a slim single. Although the mounting brackets were altered to take the twin, the lower frame rails stayed the same distance apart

As well as the range of BSA singles, the 250s were also offered badged – and slightly restyled – as Triumphs, the model designations changing from the prefix 'B25' to 'T25', which of course made all the difference. They all sold well, but were technically outclassed by the much more modern designs sailing in from the distant east, so the writing was indeed on the wall.

However, there was a final flurry. After BSA had gone pop, and while Triumph at Meriden was busying itself more with sit-ins and occupations than with actually building motorcycles, the old BSA Small Heath works produced the last of the Triumph singles, in the unlikely form of the TR5MX Avenger (great fighting name, that!), which was essentially the last of the BSA B50MX scramblers, made road legal for no known reason and fitted with two silencers of extreme silliness to replace the huge welded black box silencers fitted to the other roadsters, be they BSA or Triumph.

You have to wonder why they did this, apart from as an exercise to use up BSA B50 bits left lying around the factory following the collapse of BSA. You have to wonder a little harder at this point, because Triumph itself had already slotted its sweetest twin – the single-carb 500 – into the same bicycle, producing the TR5T Adventurer – also known as the



Trophy Trail – as seen here. Finally, finally at last we reach the story!

But before we get into riding this neat machine, here's another question for you: why did BSA never do this using its own twin? Really? The Triumph 500 twin engine weighs much the same as the BSA engine, so…

Right then. A couple of stats for you to mull over: The 500 roadster single version (that remarkable TR5MX Avenger) in its lower 9.0:1 compression form is quoted as delivering just 24bhp at 6000rpm to shift its 300lb or so, making it fairly uninspiring, while the twin, the TR5T, pumped out a quoted 30bhp at 7500rpm, although it was a little more on the porky side with a weight of 344lb. Those stats provide a decent idea of what the bikes are going to be like on the road, but they're incomplete. The twin's standard gearing is also very low, which we'll return to a little later. More importantly to most riders, however, is the simple fact that the TR5T is easy to start. Really easy. It surely must be one of the most easy of starters in the long history of easily-starting motorcycles.

Although you might expect at this point a long list of songs of praise for the last Triumph 500 twin, there are a few other comments before we get down to riding it. The engine is a delight (that's a single song of praise, okay?) – but just look how high it sits in the frame. Compare the engine's – and hence the bike's – centre of mass compared to that of the lighter single. Then consider that the bicycle was designed to take the single engine, not the twin.

Walking towards a bike for the first time is always something of a moment. Excitement, anticipation, maybe a little nervousness too. Part of the bike borrower's lot is that certain nervousness about being able to start it without embarrassment, and actually getting the thing into motion without stalling or revving the engine into oblivion. This is a tough life (not).

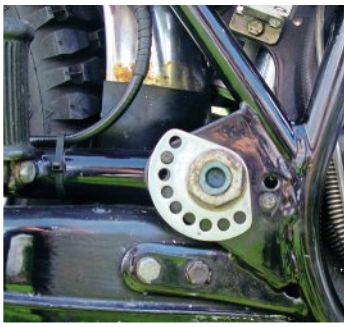
First comes a dose of staring. Great bike to look at. Very shiny, too. The fuel tank is polished alloy… at least it is according to the spec from the factory, but we've seen several in chromed steel. Walk around it a little. It looks tall. It is tall, certainly for a light 500. Although in essence it is indeed a BSA single with a Triumph engine plonked in – a factory TriBSA, no less – it doesn't actually look much like the singles. Lots of the furniture is different – a sign that Triumph was attempting to make the bike look like a Triumph, a genuine Meriden machine rather than a BSA. Even at this late stage in the game they worked hard on their image, their branding. Those details include a short seat, a different rear light assembly, a pair of unique

1: A seriously alternative way to get that Triumph fix was to buy one of these; a TR5MX Avenger. It's entirely a BSA B50MX… apart from the truly impressive silencer arrangement

2: No rubbers for the rests; the TR5T has a genuinely off-road intent. The protector on the kickstart saves the chrome from that footrest impact moment

3: Described by a US writer as a 'fire-roader', the TR5T is just as competent on UK equivalents. Sure-footed, plenty of torque and well balanced

4: The neat bash plate protects both the exhausts and the oil pipes from marauding scenery, and the rests are set a decent way back, too



1: The forks offer a claimed six inches of travel, which was fine for a road bike in 1973, less so for a machine intended to do the bouncy on the rough. And the original front brake was a six inch sls device; adequate for loose surfaces, less so on the road. Easily replaced with an eight inch tls device, and the mountings for that are already on the r/h slider

2: Slim, lean machine. Although it does carry pillion rests, only slender passengers need apply

clocks in unique binnacles and a completely different exhaust.

Swing a leg over the bike. It is tall – a 32-inch seat height was quoted, and that feels about right. Kick up the sidestand – there is no centrestand, although the lugs for one are still fitted. Rock the machine from side to side between your knees, feel out where your hands are going to grip – wide apart and pulled back, tucking in your elbows. The footrests are exactly where they should be. Exactly. Well back – further back than on the singles. Check the fuel and then the compression. The engine sits high in the bike, so the kickstart lever is also high. Kick it over a few times. Interesting. The engine feels soft, small, although there's the paired pulse of compression as you go through the motions. Key.

Hmmm. Key?

It's under your right buttock – where else? Silly place to put it. The previous soft-roader Triumph 500, the T100C, hung its ignition switch out by the headlight, up front on the left, where it should be. Fashion is fickle. Turn key. Kick, experimentally. The engine just fires up. Really, really easy. And boy does it rattle! Just like a Triumph. Odd, that.

Before you misunderstand me and worry that the engine on this bike might be about to explode, I need to tell you that it's mechanically no louder than any other unit Triumph 500 engine. It just sounds like it is because the exhaust is almost inaudible at unenthusiastic throttle openings. It's a surprise. You should also be aware that US forestry authorities liked this quiet exhaust because it was designed to contain a 'spark arrestor' intended to prevent accidental conflagrations out in the woodlands. This actual bike appears to have the little stubby chrome trim fitted for markets other than the US. Oh well. You cannot have everything.

Clutch is light and easy. Its handlebar lever is quite a stretch – although at least it's fitted with the chromed, ball-ended levers rather than the awkward cast alloy efforts fitted to the last example of this model we borrowed. And first gear engages with just a quiet click. Well… it does if you remembered to free off the clutch before starting the engine. If you forgot – crunch goes first, but only once. After the day's first engagement it's fine.

It's always instructive to bounce about on a bike before taking it out for the first time. That way you get a feel for the suspension, and for the brakes too. In this case, the suspension feels stiff, very stiff, like new. But the front brake feels good. Not a massive lever movement, little cable stretch and a generally positive feeling. Ease clutch, head out. The suspension is indeed stiff. Never mind.

The gearing is pretty short, but not as short as the factory built it. A previous owner of this particular machine had modified it a little, made it a little more practical, a little more useful on modern roads. As supplied back in 1974 or so, the overall gearing was

low, so low that the factory claimed a modest 75mph as its top speed. How come so slow? The earlier T100R Daytona would pull a full ton with an engine which was very similar apart from its extra carb and cam timing. The TR5T was genuinely intended for off-road riding, mainly in the wide-open spaces of the US. It was intended as a bike for roads – not trials sections – although not paved roads. Forest trails and hill tracks. One US journalist described it as a 'fire-roader', a fine description of a trail bike – not a trials bike.

It is a mass of compromises and contradictions. It's easy enough to raise the gearing by switching sprockets, switching the rear sprocket from its original 53 teeth down to 46 – the gearbox sprockets were the same 18T efforts on both Daytona and TR5T. This knocks the acceleration quite considerably, but does make it possible to cruise at 60-65 in relative comfort rather than with a nervous scream from the engine. Which brings us neatly to the stopping power.

The factory fitted an off-road front brake; a six inch sls device which, while pleasant enough and good looking, is not actually great in the anchorage dept. Not to worry. The same front fork sliders – and most of the rest of the front forks – were also used on the T150 Tridents, and the 2ls conical hub which was designed to haul those heavy beasts down from 120+ should make light work of the lesser Triumphs. The key word in that sentence is 'should'. Setting up a conical hub to make it work is an art – possibly a lost art. However, this is a good example, and is easily capable of stopping the TR5T, be the surface dry tarmac or a field of dry stubble. It's progressive, powerful enough and is easy at low speeds and on rubbish surfaces. They are not all like that.

The handlebars place your wrists at an unusual angle. They pull in more than most, tucking in the rider's elbows in the process. It's unusual, strange at first, but not uncomfortable. And you sit tall, and braced, and you perform that well-known sail impersonation familiar to all trail bike riders. This is not a motorway cruiser nor a café scratcher. Every ride you take will remind you of that 'fire-roader' description. It is also great in traffic, as you'd expect from a light, tall bike with great acceleration and decent brakes combined with truly agile handling. But… it is still a compromise. It feels as though it's screaming for a fifth gear in that box, and you'll be mindful of this as you're screaming along at anything much over 60. A wide-ratio box had been used in earlier generations of

3: Rear chain adjustment is accomplished by moving the entire swinging arm backwards, securing it with these neat snail cams at the pivot. Genuine TR5T frames always carry the clumsy bracket for the low level (and heavy) silencer

4: The fuel goes where you would expect it to go, but the oil lives in the frame: the filler is in front of the fuel tank

5: Neat clocks – unique to the model. For a reason we've never discovered, they were made in Japan. Of course they're accurate

500 Triumph soft-roaders, but it was never fitted to the TR5T. No idea why. A wrong call there.

And that suspension is firm. It's intended for road bikes, so the notional six inches of fork travel is reasonable, but when Triumph America entered a team of TR5T machines into the 1973 ISDT (where the British team, also on these bikes, won a silver medal) they replaced the forks with Spanish Betor units, and the hubs with items from the Rickman catalogue. This was not simply because the Triumph forks are too stiff or short-travel, but because the wheels are in no way quickly-detachable, which can be crucial in off-road events. Removing the front wheel from the stock forks involves removing nine – nine! – nuts.

Incidentally, the only mechanical failure in that ISDT was a broken fork stem, which demonstrates how tough the bikes actually are.

These are curious machines, interesting and always entertaining. But so is their predecessor, the T100C, which is more conventionally handsome, with its twin high-level pipes, handsome signature Triumph lines and fewer compromises. And as is so often the case, the rare bike is the bike which commands the bigger bucks. Triumph built a total of 2552 TR5T Trophy Trails and Adventurers – the name was changed for the second selling season, along with the colour of the fuel tank's painted panel. That is not a lot by Triumph standards, even in the early 1970s, but there are still a decent number of them around – and the prices they fetch have been rising steadily over the last few years.

It is always a pleasure to ride a good machine at a decent pace over familiar roads. After a while, most of us will try to attain a benchmark of some kind, mostly to offer a few opinions on the ride which might help someone else decide whether they'd like to try a similar machine for themselves. I have two simple tests: I like to find the point in road-speed terms at which the engine feels stressed, where ever-wider throttle openings are required for ever-smaller increases in speed. That's maybe 70-75 on this TR5T, even with its raised gearing. And I like to see how far it leans while riding reasonably rapidly before the rests or the undercarriage touch down. They didn't. I could touch toes on a roundabout, but that was that. Everything is tucked in tight and this is a tall, slim bike.

The TR5T is a bike for riding all day. It's easy, so easy. It's not a bike to ride far and it's not a bike to ride fast – it's just easy, an early trail machine and a historical footnote from the dying days of the once-vast BSA / Triumph empire. And it is in fact a good argument in favour of replacing a BSA engine with a Triumph substitute – perhaps! But… if asked, I would recommend an earlier Triumph, the T100C in its final versions. Just… because it's better. CBG

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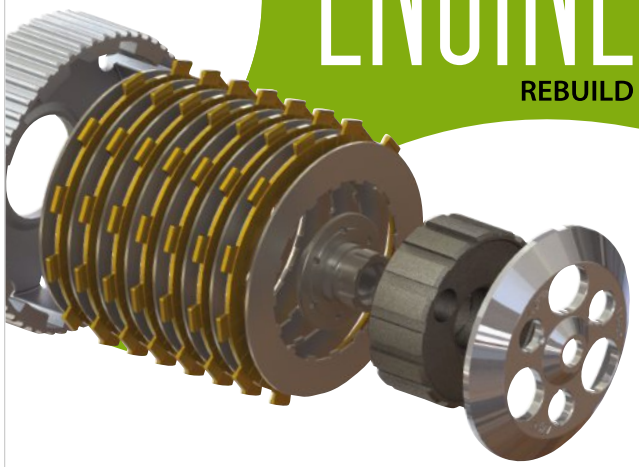

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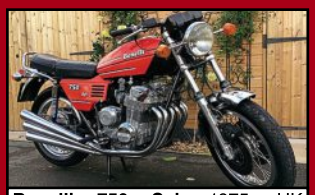

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MAKE ME A Manx

Start with a fairly clean sheet of paper and build a Manx Norton from scratch. The result might look a little like this.

WORDS BY FRANK MELLING **PHOTOS BY** CAROL MELLING, *MORTONS ARCHIVE*

LEFT:
Frank Melling performs his very best Mike Hailwood tribute aboard his nice new Norton

ABOVE:
The double overhead cam engine was the definitive GP motor of its time. Titanium exhaust weighs slightly more than a gnat's eyelash

Sitting in the pits, watching the classic racers fly by, there's plenty of opportunity to talk about what might have been and what possibly could be. Patrick Walker, who builds modern Manx Norton replicas, and I were musing about Mike Hailwood's early career. What if the world today was more or less as it was in 1960, but engine tech had advanced in certain areas? What sort of Norton would Stan Hailwood have commissioned for his talented son to ride? If you were building Mike's bike today, then what would it be like?

Stan Hailwood was managing director of Kings of Oxford, the biggest and most professional chain of motorcycle and car retailers in Britain, with more than 50 branches. He was both a millionaire and a very well connected man. Before the Second World War Stan had dabbled in motorcycle racing but was much more successful in car competition, racing a works-prepared MG at Brooklands. It was there, at the famous Surrey concrete speedbowl, that he met Bill Lacey, a name central to this story. As Hailwood's responsibilities at Kings grew, his competition days were brought to a close, but his ambition to be the very best in racing lived on, even if this dream had to be fulfilled through his son.

Enter WG (Bill) Lacey, who was one of the greatest Brooklands motorcycle racers of all time. In August 1928 he won the Motor Cycle Trophy for the first British rider to average over 100 miles in an hour on a British track, when he thundered round Brooklands in the saddle of a Grindley Peerless JAP at an average of 103mph. That's fast enough even now on that rough surface, but back then it was close to light speed. Lacey – partnered by Wal Phillips – also racked up 306 miles in three hours. Riding solo he covered 110 miles in the hour at Montlhéry in France. To say that this was blisteringly quick is something of an understatement. Not only was Lacey a star rider but he was also the finest tuner of his generation, preparing all his record-breaking machines himself.

Lacey's speciality (obsession may be more accurate) was reliability. Concentrating on the dohc Norton Manx engine, he carried out major modifications to improve the robustness of the main bearing and then applied meticulous assembly to the

rest of the engine. He experimented with twin plug ignition, chrome cylinder bores and a whole range of valve s izes – but all of these were secondary to reliability. As all real racers know; 'to finish first, first you have to finish…'

By the winter of 1960/61, Mike Hailwood's talent was recognised as something completely remarkable. So his father decided to hire Lacey and his talented daughter Ann to work exclusively on Norton engines for Ecurie Sportive, the Hailwood team. The aim was to provide Mike with the very best 500cc Grand Prix engines in the world – well, the 'very best' after the works four-cylinder MV Agustas!

The relationship between Hailwood Senior and Lacey wasn't necessarily an easy one. Stan was a self-made millionaire and master of all he surveyed. Lacey was acknowledged as a genius and acolytes hung on his every word. Neither was under-endowed in the ego department and arguments between the two were frequent, culminating with Lacey storming out, and Hailwood carefully coaxing him back.

Engine aside, the rest of the Ecurie Sportive bike was fairly standard... for a top flight Grand Prix Norton racer. There wasn't anything better than the legendary Featherbed frame, and the Roadholder front forks and Girling rear shocks were state of the art. In practice, the Ecurie Sportive chassis was the best available. The 8in rear Manx hub was considered to be the ultimate, but the top GP runners of the day all used the 9in 2ls Fontana front brake, which was an order of magnitude better than every other stopper.

To make the best of the Lacey Norton engine, a very, very expensive six-speed Schafleitner gearbox was fitted. The standard Norton clutch was retained, along with its exposed primary chain, which was lubricated by having oil dripped on it – ideal for getting on to the rear tyre!

1: Six-speed gearbox looks old but internally it is pure 2016 technology

2: Motorcycle art. The titanium welding on this heat shield should be in the Tate Modern gallery

3: Even Mike Hailwood never had a belt drive and dry clutch

4: Where its predecessors reigned supreme. Modern Manx lines up at the track

5: Enormous titanium silencer reflects the need to pacify the noise jihadists

Back in the here-and-now, Patrick and I couldn't help asking the question: "I wonder what Stan would have made for Mike if he had been building a Norton today?" We slick-shifted from reminiscence to speculation to the current classic racing scene.

Patrick Walker is a university educated, formally trained engineer with a passion for Manx Nortons. His bikes dominate the Lansdowne Classic Racing Series. They are fast but pragmatically functional, because this is how Patrick sees a racing motorcycle. Despite being desperately competitive, he is also a purist. He won't have anything to do with fakes in any form. He is also a thoroughbred engineer, for whom precision is important, and this can have its advantages and disadvantages. For him, 1mm is exactly one-thousandth of a metre. For someone ›

1: Norton forks look traditional but have Maxton's very latest gas-pressurised internals. Very trick indeed

2: A 9in twin leading shoe Oldani brake was the choice of Hailwood and all the other top GP riders of the 1960s

3: Maxton gas-pressurised rear shocks look classic but are state-of-the-art modern

4: This race machine is supermodel slim

like me, it's an adjective meaning 'pretty tiny really'. This dichotomy would have its consequences.

The end of my racing career is in sight, and I've long since given up being bothered about success, or the lack of it. Instead, for a final hurrah, I want a racing motorcycle that performs wonderfully and is also catch-your-breath beautiful, a bike that compels you to touch it for the sheer tactile joy of being so close to beauty. Much as I like and admire Patrick's bikes, I have never wanted to own one. The engineering is superb, but a standard Manx is about as physically attractive as a badly bred Rottweiler with an attitude problem: blunt, square, functional, aggressive – and utterly graceless. I was chasing the ephemeral and subtle, and these are not easy targets. I've spent my working life as a journalist, criticising and commenting on the designs of others. In the real world of real motorcycles and real money, could I do any better?

So Patrick and I agreed a price that was vastly more than I could afford and vastly less than the cost of the bike. Neither of us wanted to make a copy or a fake of the 1961 Ecurie Sportive bike, but an homage to it. We laid the foundations of the project by agreeing on its colour. The original Ecurie Sportive Norton was white, so our bike would be black; as far away as we could possibly get from making a fake anything. After this momentous decision, things got much harder for both of us. As previously alluded to, in my mind's eye I could visualise our goal and describe what I'd seen. Unfortunately, what Patrick needed was a set of measurements and precise specifications…

ABOVE: That engine is a thing of mechanical beauty. Duplex Featherbed frame is made to a standard Norton could never have achieved

The mechanical aspects of the bike were the easy part. The heart of the engine was one of Patrick's normal, two-valve, 86mm bore engines; the same basic specification as Bill Lacey used for the original Ecurie Sportive engines. The big difference at the top end of the engine is that Patrick uses enclosed coil valve springs, instead of the exposed hairpin springs of the Lacey bike, which allowed oil to spray everywhere. Things were not so environmentally sensitive in 1960.

In the spirit of the great Mr WG Lacey himself, Patrick wanted to try some new, pre-prototype valvegear parts that he'd designed. As these were entirely experimental, Patrick wanted feedback from me as part of his continuous improvement strategy. Only when they were proven in our ES engine would they be put on sale. Truly, I would be a works 'Works Racing' rider!

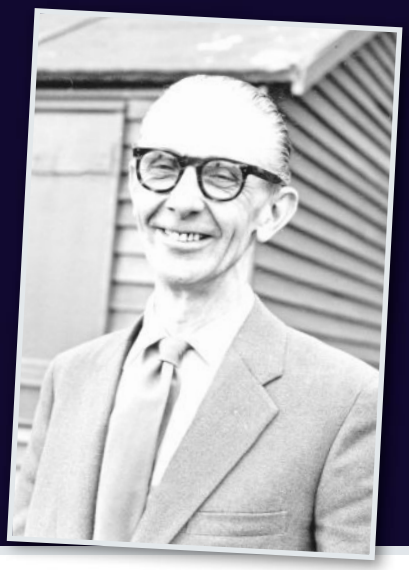
The cylinder barrel is Nikasil-coated. This is a mixture of silicone and carbide, electro-plated directly onto the aluminium of the barrel. The finish permits extremely good heat transfer and is porous, so retaining lubricant. When a Nikasil-coated barrel is honed correctly, unbelievably tight piston clearances are possible. Patrick's pistons are no more than five microns from perfect over a bore of 86mm, whereas Lacey was lucky to find a barrel within 20 times of that tolerance. This is what modern engineering can achieve in practical terms.

Externally, the bottom half of the engine looks identical to a Manx (unless you are a real expert), but is vastly different internally, with a one-piece, plain bearing crankshaft built to aerospace tolerances, and a modern oil pump circulating thin, fully synthetic race oil. Pretty much, the modern ES engine has everything that Bill Lacey would have wanted for the Hailwood bike 56 years ago.

The gearbox is a six-speeder, just like Mike's, but although the external castings look similar to a 1960s Norton, internally the Mick Hemmings gearbox is pure 21st century, with a smooth, silent change that would grace any 2016 bike. Only the original right-hand shift, with up for first gear and down for the next five ratios, would have been recognised by Hailwood.

Imagining what Mike would have made of the belt drive is interesting. Instead of a fragile primary chain, lubed by oil drips, the ES has a toothed belt drive that runs perfectly clean, without any lubrication, and also acts as a shock absorber. The dry clutch, machined from billet alloy, is a masterpiece of British engineering produced by NEB in Coventry and really ought to be in a picture frame rather than being used for the vulgar job of controlling the bike's power.

The big difference between the modern Ecurie Sportive homage and Nortons from the 1950s and 1960s is the quality of the engineering. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the iconic Featherbed frame. Lacey's determinedly selective engineering ensured that Mike's bike was as near to perfect as the manufacturing practices of the day permitted. Every single frame that Patrick has made is precisely to specification, using Norton's original Bracebridge Street drawings, on a frame jig that is true and ➧



LEFT:
Former Brooklands ace Bill Lacey, the man behind Mike Hailwood's special Manx engine

RIGHT:
Bill Lacey fettles a Manx motor, with daughter Ann providing moral support

BELOW:
Mike Hailwood on his way to victory in the 1961 Senior TT, aboard the Manx tuned by Bill Lacey

accurate. The chassis of our homage bike would have brought a smile to Lacey's face.

If the modern Featherbed frame would have met Lacey's expectations, our choice of suspension system should have exceeded them. Maxton Engineering makes some of the best suspension in the modern world, including the cleverest classic racing suspension anywhere in the galaxy. For technical reasons I wanted Maxton suspension on the bike, but Ron, Mary and Richard, who own and run Maxton, brought something else to the project: a wonderful mixture of enthusiasm, kindness and care. These are ephemeral traits but manifest themselves in a very real way in a project like this one.

At the rear was a pair of gas-pressurised shocks that, unlike the Girlings Mike Hailwood used, actually function perfectly throughout their range of travel. The Norton front forks were completely re-worked with precision shims to provide sensitivity and they feel equal to the best 2016 fork.

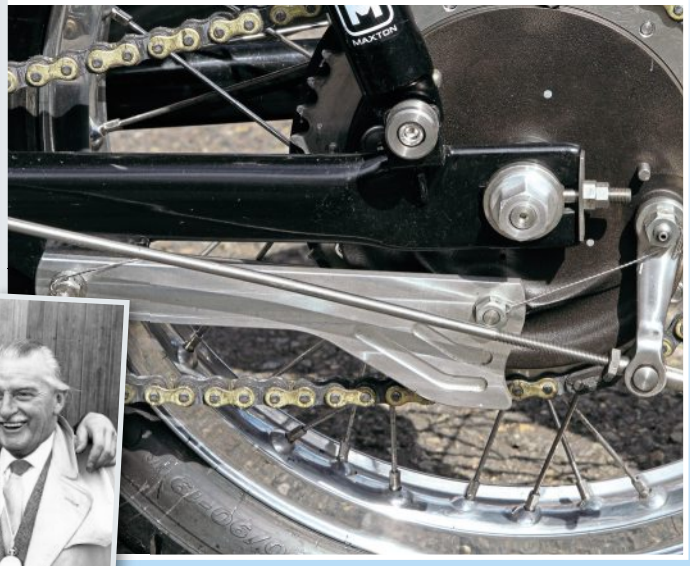
So now we had all the important bits of the bike except for one: its appearance. I wanted a long, elegant, ellipse of a motorcycle that looked as if it was doing 100mph on its paddock stand, so I specified a tiny, near anorexic, bikini fairing that flowed across the bike like a wraith of mist.

In response, Patrick fitted a great big, fat blob of carbon fibre designed to provide excellent high-speed protection at the Classic TT. This was the correct technical solution but was a million miles away from what I wanted aesthetically. And so the discussions went on, and on, and on…

In the end, Patrick won 95% of the engineering debates and I got my wishes with the majority of the styling. And how Patrick worked to put my ideas into practice! Take the black colour of the bike. Pure black is virtually unknown in modern painting

ABOVE:
Left to right, Bill Lacey, Mike Hailwood, Jim Adams and Stan Hailwood

RIGHT:
After the 1961 Senior TT Bill Lacey with Mike and Stan Hailwood



because it's almost always black with a hint of brown, blue, metallic or something. By contrast, our black is base black – hand applied and rubbed and re-rubbed until it has such depth that you can swim in it. This black is point zero on the black scale.

The exhaust, fabricated entirely from titanium, arcs across the bike like a python on the hunt and, after a long debate, concludes in an elegant tapered silencer that's pure motorcycle art. Titanium is everywhere, and the engine plates are milled to save a gnat's diet sandwich of weight. Not only are they milled but also Patrick wrote the CNC computer programme so that there are the merest hints of tool marks arcing to and fro across the metal in a modern tribute to the engine turning of old.

Then there's the fuel tank; a hand-made, graceful series of infinite curves that makes a standard Manx tank look like a five-gallon jerry can from a downtown discount store. Patrick apologised that the workings of the English Wheel and planishing hammer could still be seen on the tank, and he offered to get it sprayed in silver to the same standard as the rest of the bike. I almost wept! So the tank stays as naked as the day it was born, bearing testimony to the skill of its creator with hand tools and the eye of a genius.

ABOVE:
Torque arm clearly needed to be milled out to save a few more gnat's eyelashes!

BELOW:
The Manx built for Melling by Patrick Walker, engineering genius and the sole employee of Works Racing Motorcycles

Truly, deep in the English Midlands, metal working magic still exists.

The final result is a 500cc motorcycle weighing in at 275lb with looks that stop admirers in their tracks.

The end of this fairy-tale should be that the aging hero rode off into the distance on his perfect steed – except he didn't. The first test session was a disaster. Nothing fitted me. My new, hand-made, bespoke English racing suit hung off me like a cheap rented jacket. Patrick toiled with a smile that would have done credit to any saint and we finally got everything to fit me. But then the troubles really began. The bike wouldn't steer or stop, so it went back to Patrick for some serious TLC. The brake was easily sorted with some simple corrective machining, which the Italian manufacturers of the Oldani front brake should have done from the start.

The suspension was a much bigger task. The problem was that there are a myriad of combinations of fork spring length and weight for every Manx, and each bike is effectively a one-off job. The Maxton team was supremely helpful, but it wasn't a two-minute fix to get the suspension to precisely match the bike – and me. Don't ever think that building a one-off bike intended to be raced, as distinct from just being a show object, is easy. We did at least achieve our aesthetic aim. There we were at the fabulous Spa circuit, and along came a serious collector of MV Agusta GP machines. He spent 10 minutes examining our Norton from every angle and then said: "You have the most beautiful bike at Spa." At that compliment, I almost choked with emotion.

But the looks were not the reason for building the bike. That day at Spa, on what is the best racetrack in the world, my dream, which Patrick made live, was flawless. The motor pulled hard and revved like a 125 GP bike and all the days of work Maxton put into the suspension produced the best handling classic race bike I have ever ridden. The relationship between a rider and a race bike is difficult to articulate but, at its best, there is an intense, anthropomorphic intimacy. Our bike has these traits in every way, so that I became part of the machine, and the motorcycle became an extension of me. The effort, the money and the frustration of the previous 14 months disappeared.

ABOVE:
To see our man Melling in action aboard the Manx, fire up: youtube.com/watch?v=ByrO7hd7WcM

Dropping down past the old pits and heading towards the legendary Eau Rouge, our tribute to Hailwood's Ecurie Sportive team was singing. With my head buried in the wonderful alloy fuel tank, I had a long look ahead and considered whether I could take the chicane with 7000rpm on the tacho in fifth gear. 100mph-plus and a real achievement for a fat, bald, old, wrinkly racer. Then, without warning, Patrick's prototype valvegear decided that enough was enough. Clearly, in his quest for perfection, he had pushed the envelope just that bit too far; that's the joy of prototype engineering! For me, and the ES, Spa was instantly and completely over for the 2016 season.

Now the Norton is back with Patrick, but I'm not too disappointed, because I feel truly privileged to have ridden a very, very special motorcycle – and one that I have played some part in creating. CBG

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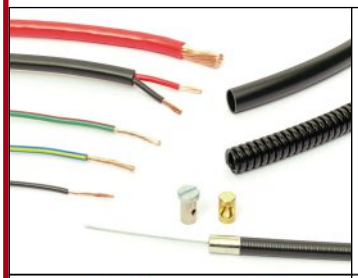

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KAWASAKI'S Super Superbike

Being mostly a conversation between classic Kawasaki builder Paul Benton and CBG

WORDS BY ROBERT DAVIES
PHOTOS BY PAUL BENTON

I HATE TO use the word 'iconic' as it has definitely been done to death; so I'll instead use the word 'symbolic' because the Kawasaki 900cc Z1 surely is one of the most important symbols of the great Japanese superbikes of the 1970s.

Edward Turner, Triumph's managing director, had the wisdom to tour the Japanese motorcycle workshops in 1960, and he saw first-hand from the advanced production facilities that the writing was on the wall for the future dominance of their machines. His (and BSA's) top designers were conscious of the fact that their parallel twins were at the end of their development. The Japanese had also realised this, and had seen the potential of the inline four, and as a result, two of the big four were seriously and secretively at work producing one.

Early in 1967, Kawasaki's bosses approached 32-year-old Gyoichi 'Ben' Inamura to lead a team of research engineers to design a large capacity, four-stroke, across the frame four. For that was what was essentially desired by the US, the largest market for motorcycles. Of course most of us are now familiar with the account of how Honda pipped them at the post with the CB750 only two years later in 1969. So, Inamura and his team licked their wounds, regrouped, and went on to build the 900 that we know and love today.

Some say that the recent prices for these two-wheel legends have gone silly! And they may be right; only last week I heard of a guy who paid eight grand for a run-down 'barn find' that needed seven grand spent on it to make it decent. Still, if the demand remains constant, while the finds become scarcer, I can't see the bubble bursting anytime soon. But how did the bike get its style?

A beauty. Getting it to this condition did take a while…

Ken Tada, Kawasaki's chief stylist, was given just one month to complete a mock up. According to Mick Withers for Kawasaki-Z-Classik: "This would normally require four to six months with a team of assistants, but Tada was on his own." His brief was simple and was to embody the company's three S's, that is – Slim, Sleek and Sexy – and, importantly, that it should look far different from its rivals, especially the CB750. One of Tada's design features was to emphasise the bike's double overhead cam system of valve operation (the Honda operated on a single) so that this label – or statement, if you like – was built into the engine's side case, and spelled out on the side panels… just in case you missed the point.

Finally, after almost five years of development and thousands of miles of secret testing, the Z1 was unveiled in California in August of 1972. As soon as the covers were pulled away, the bike received a standing ovation from all who'd been invited, and the rest, as they say, is history.

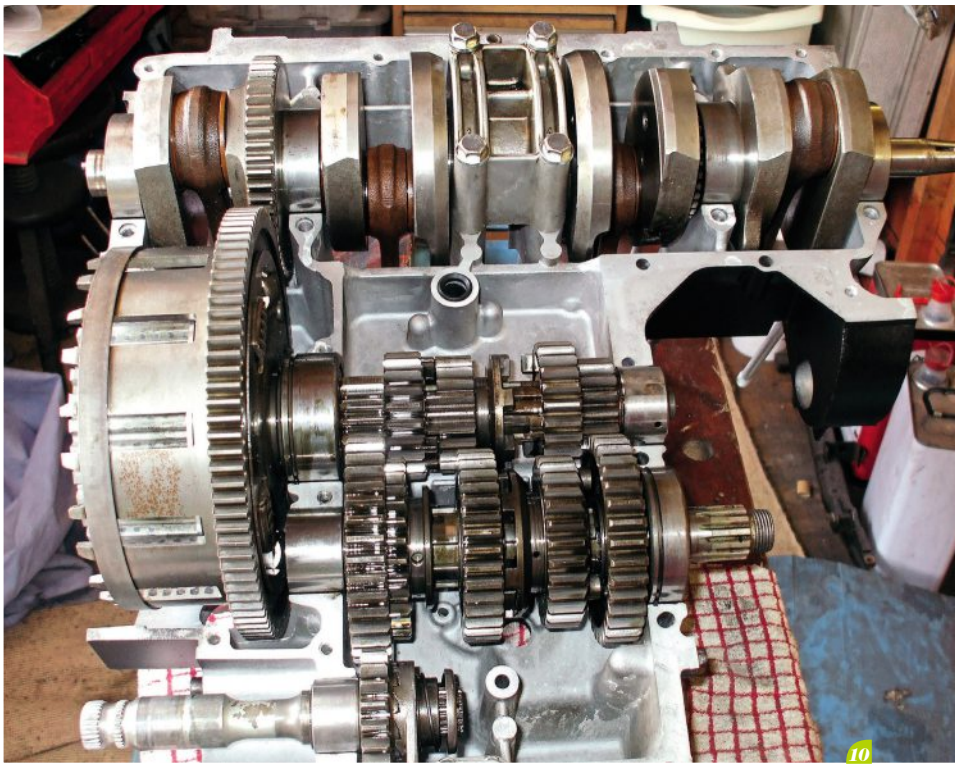
1 & 2: Carbs need to be clean, inside and out, if they're ever to work well

3: Bicycles are useful for getting around while the engine's all over the floor

4: All together now…

5: As it was…

6: As it should be and indeed as it is now



7: The bag of compost is under-rated as a workshop resource

8: Always a time for concern: taking tot top end apart to see why it smokes

9: Check out the engine number: this is an early example of its breed

10: Cleaned, checked, replacements fitted where necessary, the bottom and, primary drive and gearbox fit neatly back together

11: The sump cover needs a lot of bolts if it's to stay oil-tight. Check the threads while the engine's apart

12: Right way up. Time to start on the top end

13: Pistons on, camchain threaded

14: Barrels fitted. Check out the camchain, snug inside a towel

Paul Benton fell in love with the big Kawasakis long ago, and for over 20 years he's been restoring them. Over that period he's restored more than 30 different bikes, mainly big Kawasakis. He reckons that his favourite – for smooth riding qualities and build quality – was the Z1000 ST, however, the Z1 900 featured here was the worst case he ever dealt with. This is his account of a restoration of one from the very first year of manufacture; 1972, a vintage year if ever there was one.

CBG. Why was this such a difficult case?
Paul. Because it was a box of parts and came without wheels. The last owner had bought the bits and it had proved too much for him. But when he showed me what he had, I could tell from a careful mental count that it was mostly there and it would be possible to restore it, given time, the right parts and some pound notes. The only good news was that it was stripped ready for working on.

1: The head, as removed. Interesting that one cylinder's been running weaker than the others. Modern fuels…

2: Valves out, seats cut, valves lapped

3: All together again

4: New seals, gaskets and applied skill bring the top end together. Kawasaki's dohc arrangement is indeed a classic of its kind

5: Covers on, exhaust collars looking good…

6: One big Zed engine, ready to meet its frame

CBG. Had the bike been mistreated?

Paul. Yes, and you can see that from the junk which had collected in the oil strainer. Apart from the really bad general condition, a previous owner had Araldited several screws back into the head and in one or two other places after stripping the threads. These jobs all add up to extra work, because first you have to have the holes aluminium welded up, then the holes and threads have to be re-drilled and tapped. It's all very time consuming.

The speedo and the tacho both had faded faces, and these I stripped myself. This is a bit of an art as the two clock halves are held together by a thin metal strip that is crimped over the two halves. It's easy enough to prise this strip off, but then it is virtually impossible to put it back so it looks okay. I have made a tool that prises the strip away without damaging it, and another that crimps it back into place, much like the factory did it. But I'm not about to give that little secret away – not just yet.

New faces and new glass (cut locally for £2) were fitted, I think it's most important to have the clocks looking like new, especially when you sit on the bike. You can buy cheap copies, but they don't always have the proper rubber seals fitted; and the first time the bike goes out in the rain, water gets inside the clocks and ruins them. Ultimately you get what you pay for.

Fortunately the clutch was okay, for if you have to change the springs, the basket has to be taken apart and then re-riveted back together again.

CBG. How did you solve the problem of the missing wheels?
Paul. Hubs were obtained from John Browse Motorcycle Breakers in Wrexham, while the rims came from Devon Stainless rims; there's a useful bit of info on the company's website that states that after forming and polishing, the rims are pierced to the original specifications before being chrome plated. This is an important point if you want them to last. Hubs and rims were then put together by Black Cat Wheels of Dudley.

7: Strange fruit. A sensible way to cure parts in primer

8: It is a brave fellow who strips and rebuilds ND clocks

9: Right inside the instrument

10: The results make the effort worthwhile

11: An almost impossible amount of work has been applied to produce a rider's view like this

12: Much shine, many NOS parts

13: Lights – almost ready for the action

1

CBG. You say you had a lot of parts from Zed Power in Wigan?

Paul. Yes, Zed Power was amazingly helpful, and from them I bought (this is not a complete list) new shocks, mudguards, exhausts (£1300), indicators, grab rail, seat, fuel tank and side panels, back light, replica switches, master brake cylinder and a loom (£120). I think when the loom looks a mess like this one did then it's always a sensible policy to put a new one in place. There is nothing worse than having to sort out electrical problems at the end of the build.

CBG. And the engine on the whole was okay?

Paul. It was filthy, but when cleaned up, you could see that mechanically it wasn't too bad; the bike had only done 29,000 miles after all. The head needed to have new valve guides, and the valves were lapped back in with the usual grinding paste.

Even though the bike was legendary in its own time for its acceleration and top speed, there was nothing innovative and complicated about the engine. It still had the same basic layout as most of the other engines, excepting of course the double overhead cam – that was the new bit. BUT, when you put it all back to together, and then stand back to admire the final result, it all seems worth it somehow. CBG

2

KAWASAKI Z1 903cc

CAPACITY: 903cc **BORE AND STROKE:** 66mm x 66mm **POWER OUTPUT:** 82bhp @ 8500rpm **CARBS:** 4x Mikuni VM28 **WEIGHT:** 229.5kg (506lb) **WHEELBASE:** 58.7in **TOP SPEED:** 130mph **TRANSMISSION:** five-speed gearbox. Chain final drive **IGNITION:** 12V battery and coil

1: Job done. Definitively. Tortoise leaves the scene…

2: Ducktail, four silencers; unmistakeably Kawasaki

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MELLOW yellow DEVELOPED

WORDS & PHOTOS BY RICHARD NEGUS

Following the creation of a Norton which never was (the Unified Twin) a Noted Expert got to grips with sorting out a Commando. Obviously a simple thing…

AS A SORT of reward for completing his second Norton Unified Twin, now christened 'Dominator 650', Anthony Curzon asked whether I would like to give his Commando Roadster the 'once-over' and suggest a few improvements.

To be truthful, what he actually said was would I like to give his Triumph T100SS the once-over, but since I T-boned a Morris Minor van in the centre of the driver's door while riding one in 1967 (GWD 607D where are you now?), I've always tried to avoid any further contact with them. Thus I became the recipient, courtesy of Motorcycle Delivery (UK), of an alleged 3,468 recorded miles Canary Yellow Roadster carrying a 1970 registration.

Like me, you may at first think that it's actually an S-Type (note the chromed ring around the headlamp) fitted with Roadster exhaust pipes and silencers but no, it's an example of the first such machines assembled at Andover from 1969 onwards and sold by Elite Motors of London during October 1970, recorded as a Canary Yellow Roadster. An advertising page from US magazine *Cycle* or *Cycle World* shows an almost identical machine. Immediately noticeable is the colour difference; the glass fibre fuel tank and side panels have been repainted to an almost signal orange, introduced by the factory on later Roadsters.

Having been stood for some time, the contents of the oil tank had completely drained down to the crankcase. After draining the sump and returning the oil to the tank, the engine started on the second kick and gradually settled to a fairly even tick-over. No exhaust oil smoke, no oil leaks, and more importantly, no nasty noises.

So, check the tyre pressures, add fuel, and away we go for a ride down the lane. An hour later I'm back, thinking how nice it is to be riding a nice Roadster on such a nice day, and how much nicer it would be if the brakes actually worked. Oh, and a rear-view mirror would be nice too.

Anthony had asked that I come up with a menu of desirable improvements. Top of that list would be to improve the brakes, as I've now come to rely on 320mm discs and four-piston calipers. I don't expect Norton's drum brake to be in the same league, but riding in 'What if...' mode ALL the time can be very wearing.

Second on the list would be to reduce, if not completely stop, engine oil draining down from oil tank to crankcase. If the feed pump is so badly worn that three pints (sorry, 1.704 litres) of hot oil can seep through it overnight, then the performance of the running pump must also be compromised and the big end bearings in danger.

And then, in no particular order, the following repairs and upgrades merited consideration:

- Canister oil filter
- Cottered location for the rear fork spindle, introduced originally on the Mk3 850
- Centrestand mounted to the gearbox cradle
- Gusseted rear fork, 850 Commando style
- Roller bearing at the gearbox layshaft
- Cush drive rear wheel and brake drum

After protracted phone and email discussions, assisted by costings plucked out of thin air in conjunction with Andover Norton's new online spares ordering system, Anthony gave his go-ahead to proceed and dismantling commenced.

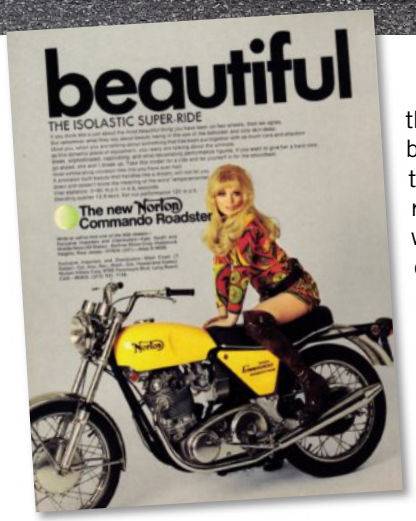
In less than a day, the engine and gearbox were out, the rear fork, gearbox cradle, and main stand removed and put in the 'Return to Sender' box, and inspection commenced.

With no metal debris found in the sump filter and no wear at the ends of the valve stems, it was agreed that rectification work of the engine would be limited to overhaul of the oil pump. With the timing cover removed, two surprises were revealed. The inside of the timing compartment was coated with grey/brown oil deposits and the camshaft chain was painfully tight.

A suspicion formed that this engine has not, as was claimed by the previous seller, been 'fully overhauled' and has probably covered more miles than the odometer reading. Removing and dismantling the oil pump showed the reason for the rapid draining of oil from the tank. The feed gears were measurably narrower than their recess in the pump housing, thus allowing oil to pass straight through. The scavenge side, however, was in a worse condition. The gear teeth were damaged by metal debris and the gear recess in the housing was badly scored. The pump body and gears were, without doubt, scrap, the only salvageable parts being the feed gears and the end plates.

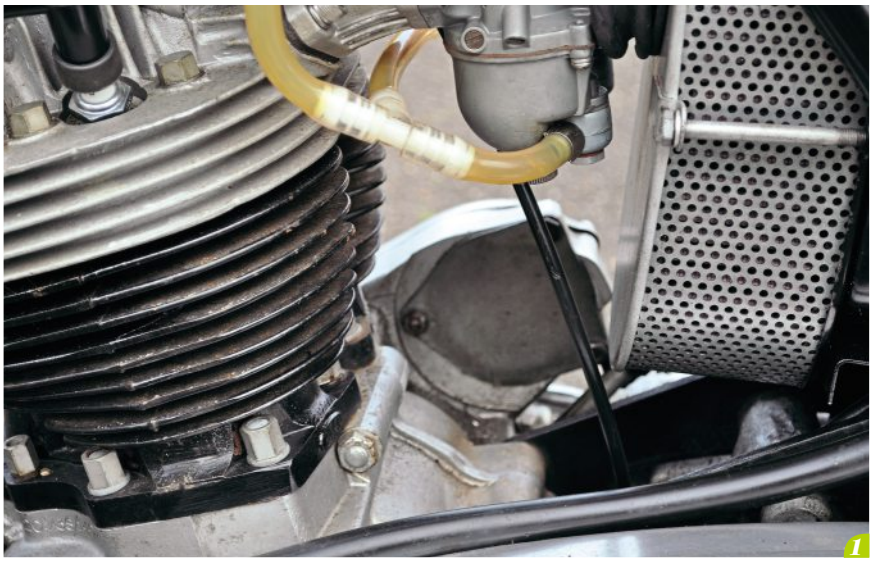
Anthony managed to provide the required new parts and the pump was re-assembled after lapping the gears and housing to give absolute minimum clearances. It was then run-in for an hour using an electric drill, stripped and cleaned, and then finally re-assembled.

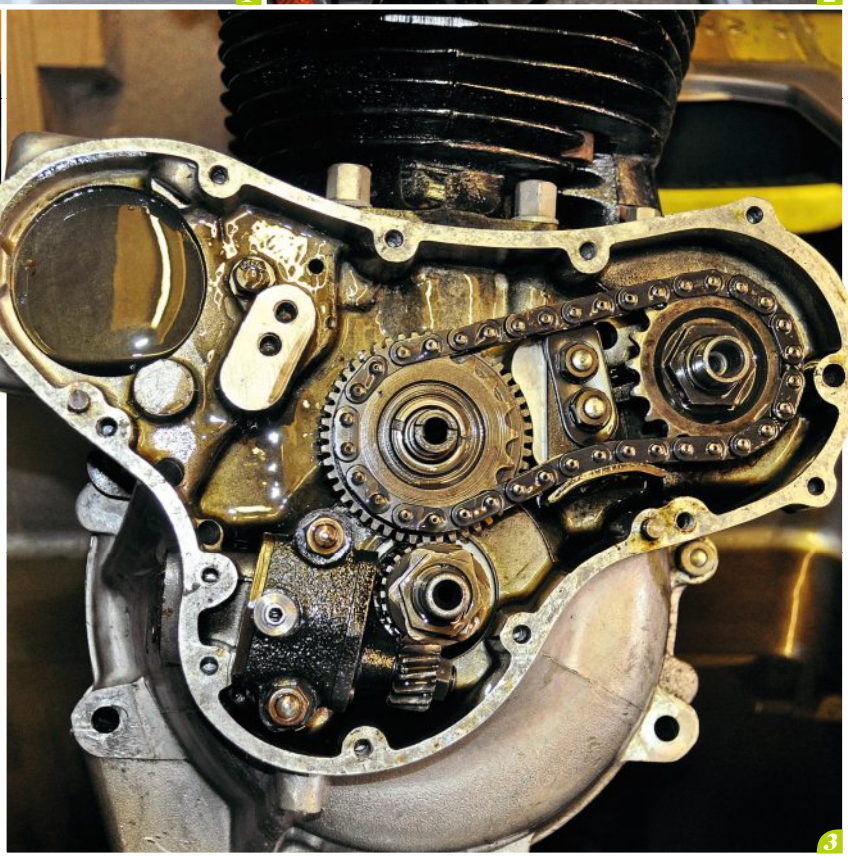
With that slight suspicion in our minds that this machine was 'not as described', attention turned next to the gearbox, with a view to checking that the layshaft ball bearing had been replaced by a roller bearing. When drained, the gearbox oil came out clean without any evidence of metal particles, suggesting that the gearbox had been recently overhauled. But removing the inner cover revealed a different story. Yes, it had been dismantled, cleaned,



Above: A brochure of the time reveals that the current yellow is a different yellow to the original yellow

Top: One early Commando Roadster, as received. Check out the early kit: drum front brake, early type stands, side panels and much else





and rebuilt – but not with any replacement gears or bearings. The gears appeared to be 1970 originals, none having the 'AH' stamping indicating improved material and heat treatment, and only two not suffering significant damage to the gear teeth.

Layshaft first gear showed no evidence of damage, either to the gear teeth or to the kickstart ratchet teeth. Mainshaft fourth, the sleeve gear, was also undamaged but, as its replacement layshaft fourth gear (with 'AH' stamping) has a different tooth profile, that gear also had to be changed. Needless to say, the original layshaft ball bearing was still in place. The gearbox was rebuilt as a proper job, with seven new gears, new bearings, seals, O-rings, and gaskets, ready perhaps for another half-century of life.

A sub-assembly was made on the bench of the gearbox cradle, vernier Isolastic kit and the rear fork. With the assembly on its side and the pivot 'grease' nipple removed, the pivot was filled with SAE 140 oil (NOT grease!) and the nipple replaced. It was then fitted to the frame and the vernier adjusted in accordance with the instructions supplied with the kit. Next, the gearbox went in and the top and bottom fixings were loosely assembled. Note the washer fitted to the top mounting bolt, inside the plates on the clutch side. The boss on the gearbox is deliberately narrower than the distance between the plates so that assembly is eased.

With the faults found in the allegedly fully overhauled gearbox, the decision to have a quick look inside the engine was not a difficult one. The result was better than expected; the valves and springs looked very recent and measured within tolerance, valve seats were good, the head to cylinder joint faces had been lapped and the original cast iron valve guides had been replaced with aftermarket silicon-bronze items, the inlets with benefit of valve stem oil seals.

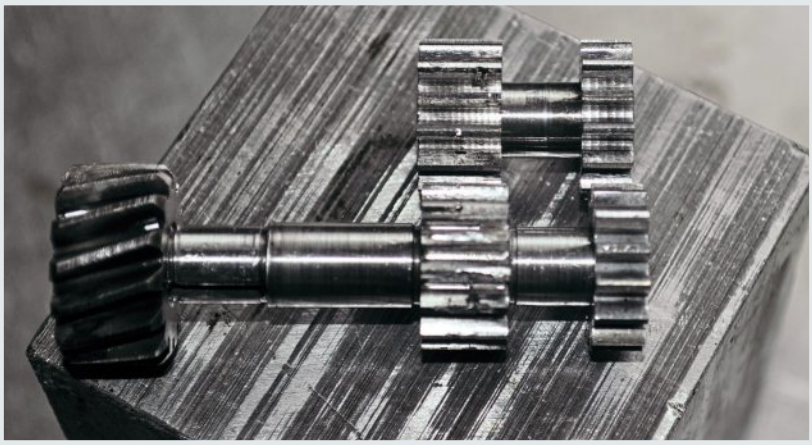
Scraping a light coating of soft carbon off the piston crowns revealed their markings, including '+.020' and Norton parts numbers '063360' and '063361', all done by a dot-matrix punch. Not original Norton pistons, for sure, as such methods of marking items is a fairly recent introduction.

Removing the cylinder showed that the pistons, too, were very recent, without any wear marks on the skirts and the compression rings were only just beginning to bed in. Cylinder bores were good, with the honing pattern clearly visible. Looking inside the piston skirts showed that the casting carried the 'AE' logo, although I suspect that these pistons were manufactured a long way away from Bradford.

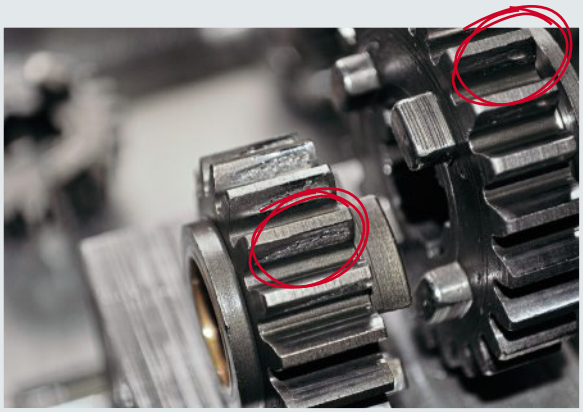
1: Early 750 Commandos used the crankcase breather (you can see the pipe here) from the Atlas. And in case you'd ever wondered, the steel plate covering the hole in the timing cover, where the magneto or distributor were mounted on earlier Norton twins, is covering the aperture for the starter motor that never was

2: And if you thought that the headlamp 'ring' was only seen on the S-Type… you were wrong

3: Timing case internals look good, although the oil drains past the pump overnight, so the pump is plainly worn



Norton's oil pump is a simple device, as seen here. Sadly, both the gears and the housing were beyond use and were replaced



Only two of the gears in the Norton's gearbox were unworn. Wear like this is best fixed by replacement with better, more modern components

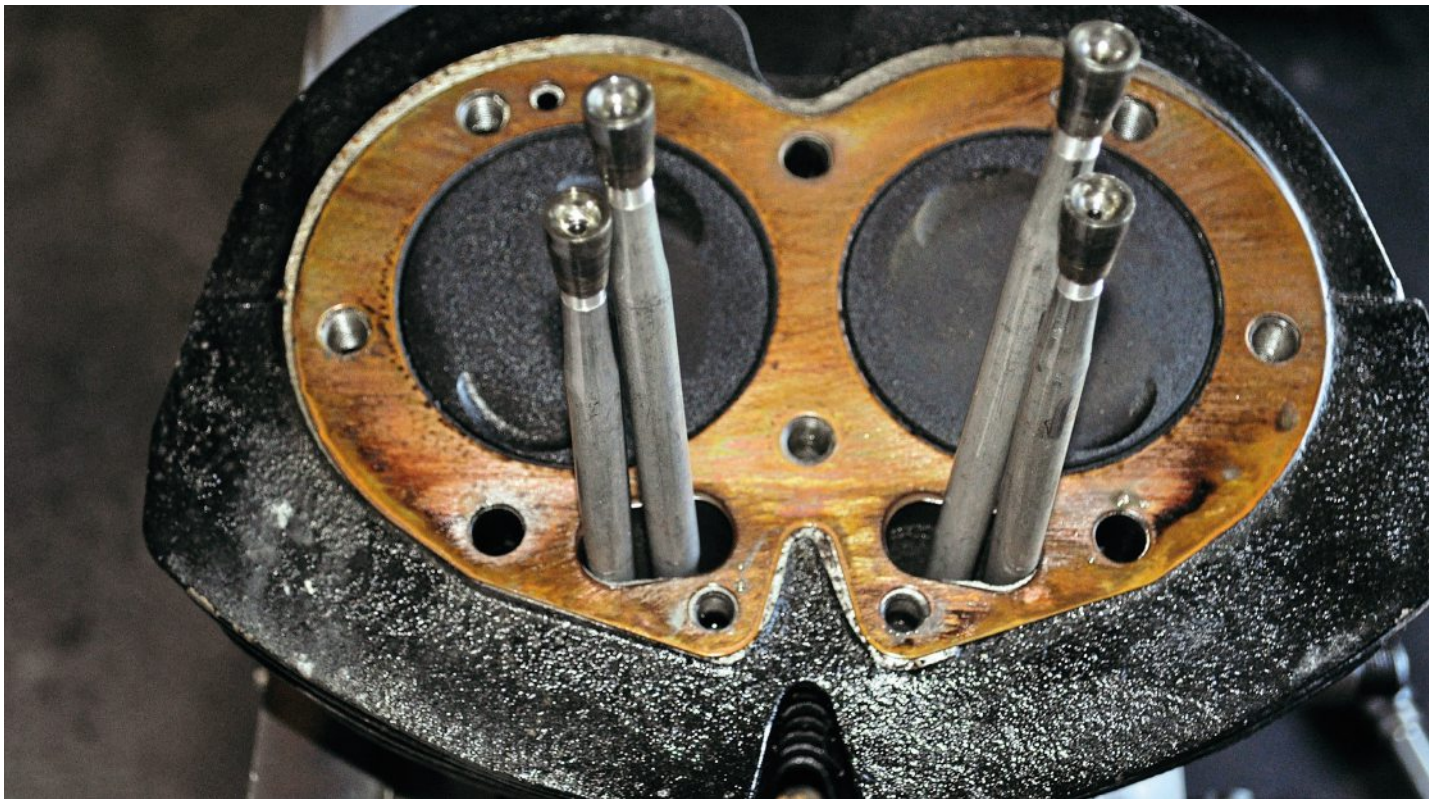
Cam followers and camshaft appeared new, the latter being the case-hardened steel type, and measuring the lift confirmed it was standard Commando profile. The crankshaft had no discernible end float, confirming that it had the original main bearing arrangement that located the shaft at the timing side with a ball bearing. Later higher performance engines had two roller bearings, allowing the shaft to have 'clunky' end float, adjustable by means of shims under the bearing inner race.

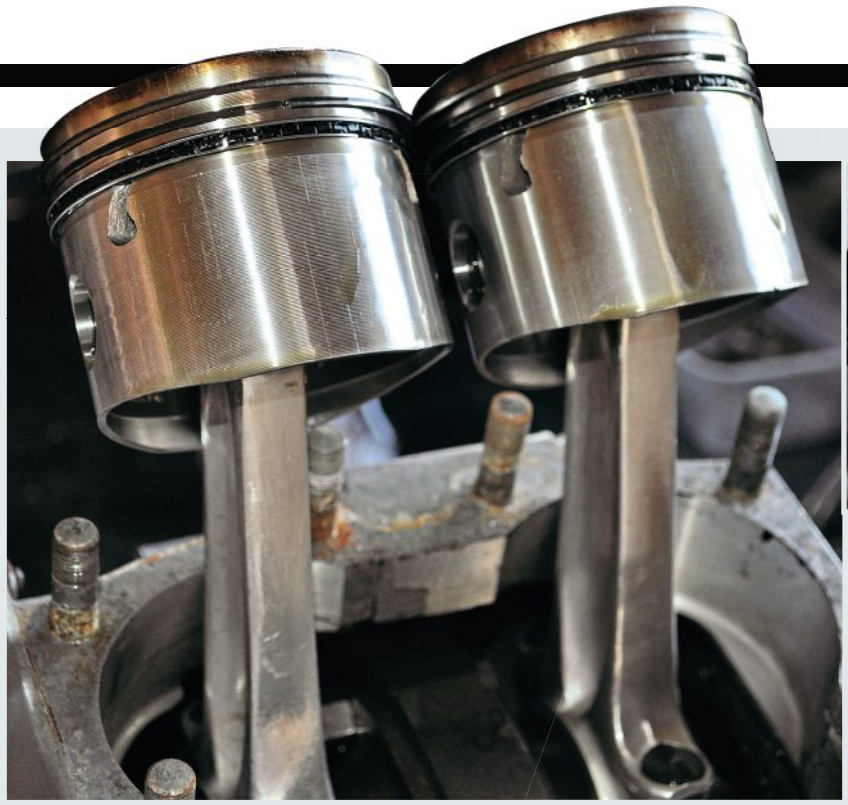
Below: Lifting the top end found a lot of decent quality parts in good condition

With enough good things found, and nothing bad, I made the decision not to dismantle further but to re-assemble the engine with new seals and gaskets.

After re-installing the engine, inspecting and fitting the carburettors (Viton-tipped float needles, brass-sleeved slides, 220 main jets, etc.), attention turned to the primary drive.

During the pre-dismantling test ride, I'd noted that the bike had a good clutch, light at the lever, no slip, and neutral was easy to find when stationary. When removing the clutch, I was surprised to find an odd





The pistons are oversize, as shown by the markings on the crown. They carry Norton part numbers, but are a lot more modern than the rest of the engine. The pistons are in excellent almost unworn condition; check out the machining marks on the skirt

combination of plates; three 'Surflex' fibre plates, two sintered bronze plates, four plain steel ones, and a 'thin' type pressure plate. Stack height of the nine plates would be thicker than if it had the correct five bronze plates, changing the attitude of the diaphragm spring. But as it worked so well, it would go back together the same way after scrubbing the plates.

The clutch centre, however, was another matter, with evidence that the bronze friction plates had started to dig into its splines. A later, induction-hardened, centre was the solution to this, and identifiable by blue discoloration around the splined outside due to the heat treatment process.

The wiring loom didn't seem to fit the bike very well, having one or two sections cable-tied together to shorten them, and repairs of the sticky tape variety. Basic as the loom is, it was but the work of half a day to make another with correct lengths, modern thin-wall cable, more modern plug and sockets, locking spade and insulated bullet connectors. At the same time, a modern Podtronics 160W regulator replaced the Lucas rectifier, Zener diode, and 2MC capacitor. The latter was beginning to show its age, with internal corrosion showing through the aluminium case. Andover Norton thoughtfully stocks a fixing kit for the 200W regulator, but drilling an extra bolt hole and judicious trimming off excess material and re-painting makes it suitable for the smaller 160W item.

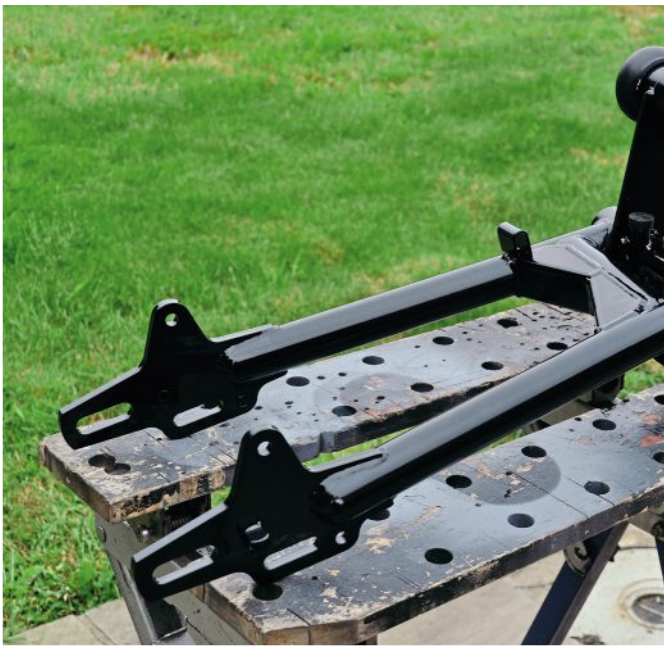
Fitting a new pair of NJB rear shocks revealed another challenge; the lower spring abutment / preload adjuster fouls the chainguard, sufficient to push the guard into the drive chain. A spacer and longer bolt rectified that, but as the bolt requires a thin head to fit under the bracket on the chainguard, it became another special item.

After fitting the rear units, another little challenge appeared when trying to fit the rear wheel adjusters to the stove enamelled rear fork. The threaded bosses for the adjusters, apparently clear of paint, didn't allow the adjusters to be screwed in, and due

Above: Despite the clutch using plates of several varieties, it worked well, so the plates went back in

to the proximity of the hole to the fork end plate, cleaning the thread with a standard 5/16in – 24 UNF tap would have been a tedious job, one flat at a time. Long series taps are available, allowing the tap holder to be clear of the fork end and the job to be done in a matter of minutes.

The colour discrepancy of the Roadster's paint job becomes more apparent when placed alongside an original get-coat Canary Yellow S-Type tank on loan from Andover Norton. The Roadster tank weighs considerably more than the Andover Norton example and has a very uneven outer surface, peppered with small blisters under the paint. I scraped away the paint around one of the larger blisters, found the original yellow gel-coat, and also found that the blister was a soft spot though the gel to the glass fibres underneath. My assumption was that the polyester resin of the tank has been attacked and degraded by the ethanol in fuel, with the inevitable conclusion being that the tank is, effectively, scrap.



Fortunately, Anthony's rabbit-out-of-the-hat department produced a sparkly new unpainted steel tank of remarkably good quality, without any sign of rust and in a cardboard box just the right size. Not made from a myriad of hand-beaten panels gas-welded together but from production press tools, seam welded, and with the filler neck having its hinge pin at the rear, wedding tackle end. From the above, my immediate thought was that it was a genuine production Roadster tank made in Italy some 40 years ago. But, as I'm increasingly beginning to realise, I was wrong yet again and it's a modern replica.

Despite consulting various expert sources, there was no firm agreement about a paint code for Canary Yellow. The original gel coat pigment was Llewellyn Ryland 'Sunburst Yellow' but my local automotive refinishing supplies distributor couldn't cross-refer that to an automotive paint. One source suggested it was Alfa Romeo giallo (Italian for yellow) but there

Left: It's likely that the bronze plates had worn the original clutch centre, so that was replaced with a modern component. The blue discoloration shows that it's been induction hardened. Oh yes, never try to rebuild a clutch without a tab washer for the centre nut

Above: One refurbished swinging arm and gearbox cradle, complete with Vernier iso adjusters. If you'd ever wondered about the secret of the Isolastic system's success, this is it

Right: Job donet

are many different giallos in the Alfa range and none of the colour samples came anywhere close. Another source suggested Ducati yellow but, again, that proved not a close enough match. Finally, after what seemed like an hour comparing colour samples in the sunlight (that's Sunny Scunthorpe, Jewel of the North), the distributor suggested that rather than looking for inspiration in vehicle manufacturers' recent colours, we should be looking at those available half a century ago. Thus he rooted in his bottom drawer and brought out a colour-fan for a basic two-pack colour range that is more industrial than automotive, including only one yellow – and that matched! With optimism borne of desperation, that paint was placed on order.

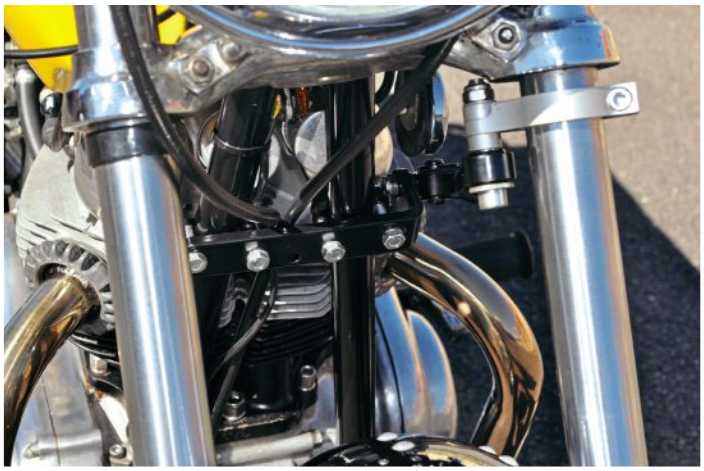
Below: Studies in yellow. The tank in the centre is an original GRP fitting from a 1971 Commando 750S. On the left is the tank which came with the feature bike, and on the right is the new steel replica tank painted the correct colour

My local spray shop did a first class job of the painting, but insisted that I take responsibility for applying the 'Dryfix' decals before final lacquering took place. Having seen many variations of decal positions over the years, even factory-applied originals, I didn't relish the thought of doing it. To my mind, wrongly-applied decals, particularly those side panel ones placed parallel to the top edge of the panel, spoil the whole look of the bike.

After application of the decals and a coat of clear lacquer, the finished job is a near-perfect colour match to the original 1970 sample tank. A big thank you to the patience of Humberside Paints for finding the exact paint colour and to the skill of Avant Garde in its application.

In the photo showing all three tanks, the centre one is an original GRP tank on loan from Andover Norton's 1971 S-Type and the one on the right is the new steel tank, painted by Avant Garde. A perfect match to the 'blind-man-on-a-galloping-horse' and a world of difference to the other one, on the left, that was fitted to the bike when I received it.

The 1970 Roadster was originally manufactured with silencers of the same internal construction as the S-Type rather than the 'pea-shooter' absorption silencers of later models. These early ones had an internal louvred tube, closed at the outer end, and were totally devoid of any absorption material. The



sound was best described as 'fruity' and they were soon superseded by the straight-through absorption type still manufactured today. Local company Allden Exhausts manufactured a complete system in stainless steel, including a pair of these 'fruity' silencers. And as the pipes were made using the bike as a checking fixture, they do actually fit, unlike some of the chrome plated examples available today.

A Pazon ignition was fitted and timed by eye to 28° BTDC; fuel and oil were added, and the carburettors tickled until fuel dribbled. Two gentle prods through compression, switch ON, and the first proper kick produced a running engine. Now that has never happened to me before!

Above: A steering damper? On a Norton? Really!

Below: Looking very yellow, and ready to ride…

Minor twiddling with the carburettor screws resulted in a steady idle with oil returning to the tank as a regular bubbly stream.

After re-checking all the fasteners for tightness, I ventured out onto the lane for a short test ride. The engine kept running, nothing broke, nothing leaked, and nothing fell off so, after checking over again and filling the tank, I went for a longer ride. The front brake, fitted with a stiffening kit, began to improve although I formed a suspicion that brake judder may require the drum to be skimmed.

After 120 miles, the bike was checked over again and the ignition timing set precisely with a strobe timing light. Job done. CBG

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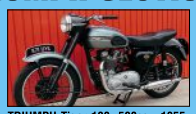
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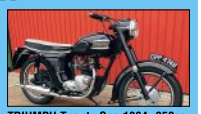
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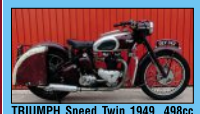
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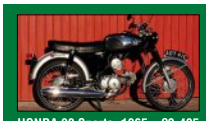
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BMW R60/5 1972, unrestored, great patina, new tyres, available from the 05 Dec 2016, bike is in South of France, €4900 Tel. 00336 07093776 Email. chrisbestpaints@gmail.com

BMW R69S vgc, 1966, meticulously maintained, numbers matching, starts & runs perfectly. Email. chame6390@gmail.com USA

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BMW R80RT 1984, new front tyre, battery, Hedingham sidecar, leading link, forks very well set up, MoT Jan 2017, £2700 Tel. 07890 167010 West Midlands

BMW R90S 1973, rare early model, solid discs, kick start, 22,000 miles, MoT, superb condition, matching numbers, full refurb, £7995 Tel. 01932 240150 London

BMW1150GS Adventure, 2002 reg 02, MoT Oct 2017, 29,652 miles, bike has covered 2000 miles in the last five years Tel. 07711 227001 Cheshire

BRIDGESTONE Mk11 200S, 1969, older restoration, vgc, great running order, MoT July 2017, superb example of these highly sought after, rare in UK, £3995 ovno Tel. 01474 746930 Kent

BSA Golden Flash, Watsonian combination, professional rebuild, records of restoration, very well sorted & rides well, £6000 Tel. 01342 842031 Surrey

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GREEVES SCOTTISH alloy rims, stainless spokes, new cables, original reg, 1961, £2000 ono Tel. 01983 508230 Isle of Wight

GILERA SATURNO Sport 500, 1948, third owner only, very good condition, €25,000 Email. marco.bottoni@btbottoni.it

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HONDA CB125S 1974, frame, swinging arm & other parts have been powder coated, engine has been vapour blasted, import in 2001, ideal winter project, £450 Tel. 07747 786671 Tyne & Wear

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TRIUMPH SPRINT 955i, 2001, vgc, standard bike, top box, new chain & sprockets, MoT July 2017, 38,000 miles, £1595 Tel. 01452 731360 Glos

TRIUMPH SPRINT ST1050, 2010, 52,000 miles, good condition, Cat D, frame & engine repainted, D&D exhaust, £2500 ono Tel. 01553 767904 Norfolk

TRIUMPH T100A superb condition, ride or show, matching numbers, 1961, loads of history, parts too much to list, £5750 Tel. 01332 573265 Derbyshire

TRIUMPH THUNDERBIRD 1951, Triumph 6T, very nice condition, good starter and runner, stood for four years, very rare, £6500 Tel. 01406 351276 Lincs

TRIUMPH TIGER CUB T20SH, 1965, fully restored, matching numbers, 12V electrics, Boyer ignition, MoT May 2017, £3300 ono Tel. 01303 864243 Kent

TRIUMPH TROPHY 4 1993, 1200cc, 18,000 miles, new back tyre to put on, chain ok, average condition, £1000 ono Tel. 07989 618525 Warwickshire

TRIUMPH TR6R 1970, totally rebuilt all new parts & tyres, five speed gearbox, new 17" wheels, lowered to suit shorter person, sold with full MoT, vgc, £10,000 Tel. 01432 820291 Herefordshire

VELOCETTE LE Mk2, 1959 ex-police bike, fitted with 6V battery 12V battery and conversion kit included, vgc needs minor fettling, £1700 Tel. 07737 721052 Hampshire

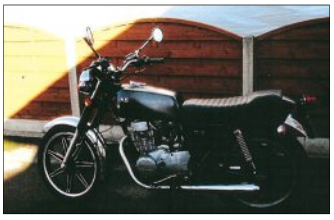
VELOCETTE VIPER new main bearings, b/end, s/end, 12 volt alternator electronic ignition, new exhaust carb, chains, stainless guards, £6000 Tel. 02083 045132 Kent

YAMAHA 535 1997, V Twin, fair condition for year, new rear tyre rack & topbox MoT May 2017, £1250 ono Tel. 01934 811498 Somerset

YAMAHA DRAGSTAR 650 classic, 2006, MoT Oct 2017, as new condition, only 3700 miles, two careful owners, £3350 Tel. 07957 223665 Hampshire

YAMAHA DT80MX 1979, runs well, log book, rare genuine bike, £650 Tel. Chris 07742 323990 East Sussex

YAMAHA TW125 1999, only 3800 miles from new, in superb condition, long MoT, £1400 ovno Tel. Steve 07584 281663 Gt Manchester



YAMAHA XS250 1978, MoT 27/7/2017, vgc, good chrome, comes with a complete bike for spares, plus new recovered brown seat Tel. 02380 893953 Hants

YAMAHA YA3 1965, original bike, £875 Tel. 07743 370641 Staffs

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BMW R80/7 1977/80, one owner from new, with panniers, owner retiring, lovely condition, 35,000 miles, no MoT. Tel. 01625 427596. Cheshire.

BMW R80RT Mono, 1994, MoT 2017, cockpit fairing, (not RT fairing) crash bars, panniers, £1750 Tel. 01522 809630. Lincs.

BSA BANTAM D14-4 black, very good condition, 1969, MoT 2017, new battery, £1250 no offers Tel. 07763 429913. Lancs.

CAGIVA T4E 350cc, 1991, army bike, long MoT, £975 Tel. 01732 845057. Kent.

FB MONDIAL believed 160 two stroke, all original, unrestored, but no log book, running order, £3000 Tel. 01664 474894; 07773 881441. Leics.

HONDA CB250 1973, frame, swingarm, front forks & wheels, frame & swingarm powder coated, black wheels respoked & rimmed, new fork stanchions, includes V5, pics on request, £495 Tel. 07803 704668. Leics.

HONDA CB750K 1981, DOHC, dark red, vgc, 4-1 silencer Hagon rear shocks, no MoT, loads of spares, £2000 Tel. 01455 271565. Leics.

HONDA TL125 Trail bike, 1976, no lights otherwise complete, runs, in need of a makeover, no docs, £825 Tel. 01295 722767. Oxon.

KAWASAKI Z900 1976, good condition, new MoT, all original apart from exhaust, £11,000 Tel. 07779 001916. Kent.

ROYAL ENFIELD 1960 Constellation + MK1 interceptor engine to restore, lots of new parts and Sealey bike lift, £2750 Tel. 01293 882151. West Sussex.

SUNBEAM S8 1954, parts for sale, all in good condition, mudguards, tank, headlight, engine, please ring for list Tel. 01249 654050. Wiltshire.

SUZUKI SAVAGE L5 650, 1997, only 13,000 miles, very good original condition, no rust or damage, MoT April 2017, £1400 ono Tel. 07986 735619. Mid Glamorgan.

TRIUMPH 3TA 1962, not restored, metal tinware, MoT 2017, £2650 Tel. 01522 809630. Lincs.

TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE tidy bike, 1972, needs battery, keys, etc £3500 Tel. 07821 021162. Oxfordshire.

TRIUMPH SCRAMBLER 2011, green, 9300 miles, Arrow exhaust, engine bars, brown leather single seat + dual, Bash plate, pre 60s registration, oil changed, annually immaculate bike, £5350 Tel. 07792 678476. Worcestershire.

YAMAHA XS1100 Special, 1980, new battery, new reg/rec, 4 into 1 exhaust, current on Sorn, MoT until March 2017, £1850 ono Tel. 01513 068745. Wirral.

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BMW F650/G650GS top case, fits full face helmet, as new, locks to frame mount, £30 Tel. 01305 250260. Dorset.

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BSA GOLDSTAR STD gear cluster with reverse camplate for rearsets, vgc, £90 ono. Also BSA B32C high level exhaust pipe, good chrome, £25, post at cost Tel. 07498 338727. South Yorks.

CLEAR OUT: CARBS D1 Bantam, Amal 72/1 Cub, Amal 47/022/S/CAC, Amal 627 Villiers V508CA, D1 air cleaner, Lucas horn, Cub sidestand Tel. 07743 370641. Staffs.

HONDA 250 Super Dream frame with engine, good two into one exhaust forks, wheels, £85 Tel. Mick 01516 085770. Wirral.

HONDA 400/4 manual clutch basket, clutch cover, crankshaft, points cover, fork covers, side panel, foot rests, fork yokes, speedo gearbox, spindle Tel. 01964 534153. East Yorks.

HONDA CB250 WHEELS 1973, brand new rims & spokes by Fork 'n' Wheels, Leicester, includes hubs, £350 the pair, pick up only Tel. 07803 704668. Leics.

HONDA CX500 Eurosport parts: radiator, £10; petrol tank in white, £10; almost new front tyre, £30; rear light + flashers, £12 Tel. Richard 01842 819969. West Norfolk.

HONDA RS250 front and rear wheels, good condition with alloy rims, £45 for the pair Tel. Mick 01516 085770. Wirral.

K2F MAGNETO from 1955, T110 engine, fully working with new pick-ups, points & end caps, including advance/retard cable & lever, £450 ono Tel. Graeme 07717 733556. Tyne & Wear.

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NORTON SINGLES wiring loom 1959-62, £25. Commando gearbox sprockets, £15 each. BSA B31 engine sprocket, £15, all new Tel. 01926 770123. Warwickshire.

PANTHER 100 289 pre monobloc carb, fully restored by leading specialist, £200 Tel. 01926 770123. Warwickshire.

TRIKE BACK-END frame with large rack, axle, drive-shaft with electric reverse, 15" alloys with near new tyres, mudguards with lights, £1595 ono Tel. 01977 510546. Yorkshire.

TRIUMPH 5TA FRAME stove enamelled, £250, engine less head/barrel, gearbox cover (reconed), £300, pipes/silencers unused, £200 or £650 the lot Tel. 01978 842668. Clwyd.

TRIUMPH 6T petrol tank, came off 1956, Thunderbird, £180 includes p&p. Also complete mag for G80 Matchless, £140, also new centre stand T120 Tel. 07743 642408. West Yorkshire.

TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE 1969, cylinder head in mint condition, blasted & ready to have new valves fitted, guides all good, rare head, £400 cash, cheque or PayPal can post, £15 Tel. 01455 641427. Leicestershire.

TRIUMPH SPRINT 900 1995, breaking ie pair of 17" wheels, £70 Tel. 07789 801540. Wiltshire.

TRIUMPH TIGER CUB barrel and piston, 1960, good condition, £90 Tel. 07768 976086.

VILLIERS 197 6E engine complete, £95 Tel. Mick 01516 085770. Wirral.

YAMAHA YFZ 450cc, barrel & piston 95m/m, £75. Honda CB400 four starter motor, £25. BR/Mast cylinder, £25, CB9900 s/arm assy Tel. 01772 783774. Lancs.

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BSA B25 or Starfire project bike wanted. Tel. 01723 360413. North Yorkshire.

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DOUGLAS DRAGONFLY wanted, must be black & silver, preferably restored if possible, must have matching numbers Tel. 07876 235080. Hampshire.

GOLDSTAR CATALINA SEAT wanted also finned rear brake drum & chrome rear brake plate, 6 volt voltage regulator in good order Tel. 07498 338727. South Yorks.

GPO TELEGRAM BOYS helmet wanted, also pouch belt, blue greetings pouch, BSA pannier frames anything GPO considered Tel. 07551 665928. Sussex.

GRANDAD AND AUTISTIC grandson wants any old British motorcycle for pleasure rides, 350 or 500cc, single or twin, £2000 cash Tel. 01733 241089. Cambs.

HONDA CB550 wanted front forks, including yokes for a mid 70s single cam CB550 Honda Tel. 07778 415465. Herts.

LOOKING FOR an early Honda CA with V5C for restoration, or just possibly a CD175 Sloper, no dealers please, will travel Tel. Richard 01842 819969.

HONDA CR93 wanted Tel. Norman 07910 121664. County Antrim.

LOOKING FOR parts or a complete wreck to restore a C10L, any bikes that are in wreck, solo or combination, also parts for D1 or D3 including 19" wheels which are 2.75 19" Tel. 01617 406106. Manchester.

LUCAS 3ET COIL wanted as fitted to US Triumphs in the mid sixties Tel. 01933 355796. Northants.

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MZ TS250/125/150/50 wanted any of these models, parts non runners, not a dealer, these are to augment my collection, South West Area only please Tel. 01404 46570. East Devon.

NORTON DOMINATOR barrels 600cc and 650cc also a set of standard pistons Tel. Alan 07789 006614 anytime. Ayrshire.

NORTON DOMINATOR OR ES2 wanted, either in running order, restoration project or spares, early model preferred, but all offers considered, have money and will travel Tel. 07951 693209. Leics.

OUTER PRIMARY COVER to fit Triumph T120, TR6, 1960-1962 also Lucas 3ET coils Tel. 01933 355796. Northants.

SILVERSTONE MOTO GP 2015 programme wanted, purchase or swop for Isle of Man TT 1967, Diamond Jubilee programme Tel. 01209 712723. Cornwall.

TRIUMPH OR BSA twin wanted for restoration project, anything considered, eg A10, A65, T120, T140 or ideal early rigid Triumph, any spares welcome Tel. 07932 948153. Notts.

TRIUMPH OR BSA pre-unit twin wanted, complete/incomplete or needing restoration, looking for winter project, private retired buyer able to travel Tel. 07964 759326. Devon.

TRIUMPH OR BSA TWIN wanted, 60s or 70s, prefer a useable bike, but absolutely any condition considered, cash paid, can collect Tel. 07973 905978. Tyne & Wear.

TRIUMPH TR6 S/S 1962, burgundy red & silver sheen Tel. 01634 240294. Kent.

WANTED FOR 1961 Royal Enfield Constellation, restorable three piece silencer, the type with alloy end cone Tel. Mike 07905 529058. Middlesex.

WANTED HONDA early 1970s CB450/500 Twin for restoration, complete bike with V5, realistic price, cannot afford ebay prices. Tel. Mike 07511 688088. Birmingham.

WANTED HONDA CB750K2 looking for a UK bike in well restored or good original condition with good four into four exhaust, planet blue preferred but gold okay Tel. 01323 740011. East Sussex.

WANTED ORIGINAL rear mudguard for Triumph T140D Special, 1980, secondhand or new Tel. 07789 006614. Ayrshire.

WANTED OUTER PRIMARY COVER to fit Triumph T120, TR6 1960 to 1962 Tel. 01933 355796. Northants.

WANTED PANTHER Model 70, 350cc or Model 60, 250cc 1946-1948 Sloper cylinder head, rocker cover, Pushrod telescopic tubes and pushrods, why? Tel. 01284 753974. Suffolk.

YAMAHA SR500 wanted any condition from good to project Tel. 01539 536390. Cumbria.

Miscellaneous

BELSTAFF TRIALMASTER JACKET 38" chest, vgc, £10. Belstaff Trialmaster jacket, 34" chest, vgc, £10. Belstaff Trialmaster trousers, 34"/36" waist, vgc, £10 Tel. John 01162 888957. Leics.

BSA STAR CLUB MAGAZINES 1980/1990, mint condition, best offer. BSA Bantam Super Driveside cover coils carb, small JAP lawnmower engine, both shed find, free to good home, collect or postage Tel. 01298 79316. Derbyshire.

HYDRAULIC ENGINE LIFT 1000kg, used once, as new, buyer collects, £125 Tel. 01594 823940. Gloucestershire.

LITERATURE: Triumph Unit Twin, new, a unique opportunity to purchase 1974 Sales Brochure (USA), 1974 UK Sales Brochure & Price List plus 1973, TR5T Trophy Trail Poster, photos on request, £75 Tel. 01598 711976. Devon.

MAGAZINES CLASSIC BIKE 1-24 in binders, plus 30 other Motor Cycle, Motorcycle Mechanics, Motorcycle Sport, 65 copies, mid 60s-early 70s, £25 the lot Tel. John 01162 888957. Leics.

MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS 1963-1967, 24 mags, £24. Classic Motorcycle and Classic Bike Guide, 83 magazines, £20 or £35 the lot, buyer collects Tel. 01623 553838. Nottinghamshire.

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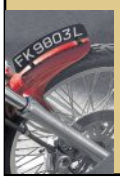

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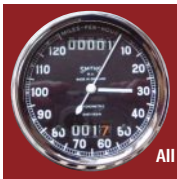

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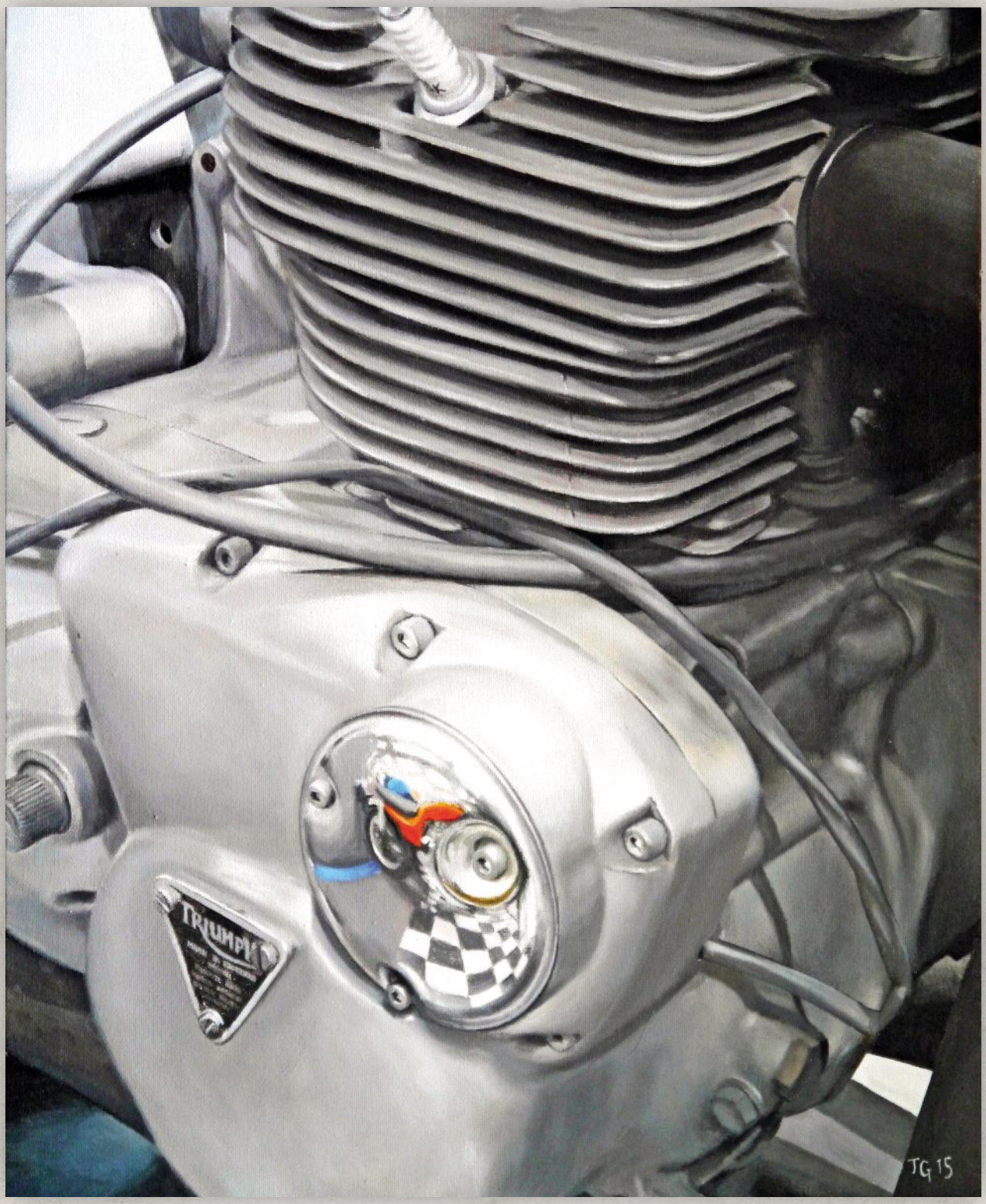

'I spotted this Triumph triple engine in a trick racing frame a while back. An added bonus was the additional Triumph reflected in the chrome; a nice mix of cast and reflecting surfaces I thought. The overall composition was almost entirely monochromatic, and this made the colours of the Hurricane even more apparent.'

View more of Talana's artwork at talanagamahartwork.com

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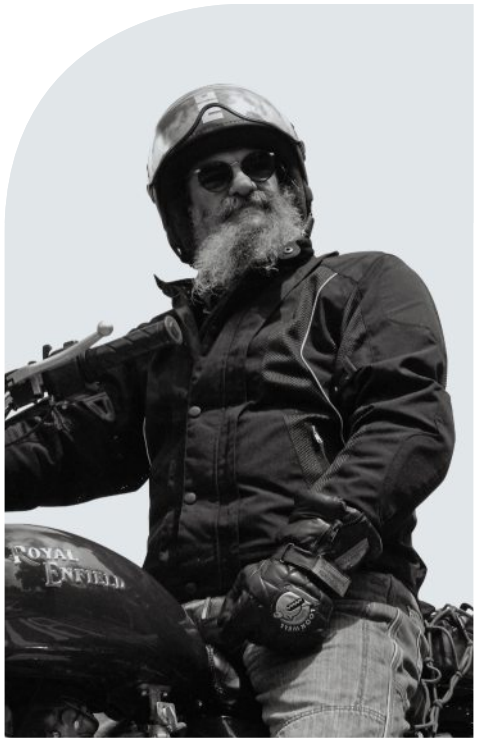

FRANK **WESTWORTH**

Famous last words

You don't know what you've got til it's gone

I'M ALL OF a lather. I feel like a schoolboy going on a hot date. No… better than that. I feel like a guy who's been ditched by his best girl and is now expecting her to return, beaming, back into his life. I could go on (and often do), but…

Many, many years ago, I did an unwise thing. One thing among very many, happily. I took a stroll around the auction sale room at the giant Stafford Show. I often do this. It's a way of pretending to be working when in fact I'm just gazing at bikes, like y'do at bike shows. That's why they're called bike shows. It would have been 1996 or so. And, as I shambled genially along the rows of bikes, bikes in every kind of condition and of every kind, I stopped in front of a green one. Stood and stared for a little while. It looked great. Better yet, it was a Norton, a singular Norton; a Model 50, fetching in green and dusty rust.

It would be disingenuous for me to pretend that I'm a fan of Norton's legendary, iconic, etcetera featherbed frame, because I'm not, not particularly. And I'd always preferred the non-featherbed Norton singles – and some twins – to their feathery equivalents. That said, the green machine in the giant auction was a featherbed 50, rare now, as so very many of them got converted into Tritons way way back in the way way back, when boys were boys and Brylcreem, let us not forget, was fashionable.

I was uncharacteristically quiet that evening, troughing down hard on Little Chef burgers somewhere. Thinking about that 50. Wondering how much it would fetch in the next day's sale.

The next day, I could be found lurking once again in the sale room, sitting in a chair and clutching a card which allowed me to spend money I didn't have on a bike I didn't need. Such is the delight of the auction. I never buy bikes without at least riding them, at least hearing them run, or at least kicking them over for signs of life. Except at auction. What is it about auctions?

A figure loomed on my left, and leaned down to me. I knew the face, if not the person particularly well. "You're after the Norton, the 350?" he asked, approximately. "Me too," he added after I'd nodded. "Let's not bid against each other, okay?"

This was scary stuff. Was I being intimidated, mobster-style? Would I wake up one morning to discover a horse's head in bed with me? I raised a calm, cool eyebrow and did my best to perform quizzical.

My companion smiled. "I only want the number," he revealed. I nodded, which is always a safe thing to do in mysterious circumstances. "If you don't bid and I get the bike, I'll MoT it, re-register it and drop it around to yours for the same price I paid. How's that?"

And he did. Just like that. I've never forgotten it. The bike was of course ace, took almost no effort to return to running status, and I parked it to one side in The Shed, ready for the day I'd ride it forever. Which… I never did, other passions coming and going, as passions tend to do.

And then, almost suddenly and for no reason I can remember now, I sold it to a very nice man in Scotland on the weepy condition that he did not restore it. The world is rammed with glorious restorations; patina and originality are every day flushed down the great fakery of restoration road. The Norton deserved better than that. I was stern. The excellent Scotsman agreed.

But… he is a restorer, and a very competent one. His occasional communications revealed his anguish. His every urge and wallatery bulge demanded that he take a rusty genuine old-timer and convert it into a shiny replica of its former self. I chewed the insides of my cheeks, chomped down on my tongue, although that's not easy to do deliberately.

Finally, he gave up – but he did not give in! No! He sold it to another Scotsman, and on the same conditions. Honour, gentle reader, is alive and well. And then, about three years after I stupidly and to my unending regret sold the bike, an email landed from a familiar name. Would I like the bike, the old green Norton, back? What! Yes of course. Add some more exclamation marks. They were flying around like autumn midges. There's more! I could have it back for the same price that I'd sold it for – was that okay? I immediately transferred a pitiful quantity of money through the magical electronic bankery ethers which make spending less painful somehow.

A mail arrived from the remarkably named Bike Bus, suggesting that a visit from their man with their van was imminent. While I've been writing this… he arrived, complete with the old green Norton. I am just going outside, and I may be some time… CBG

'I parked the bike in The Shed, ready for the day I'd ride it forever. Which … I never did, other passions coming and going, as passions tend to do…'

WHO IS FRANK WESTWORTH?

Frank Westworth is the editor of *RealClassic* magazine, the latest in a long series of publications that began in 1982 when he was bullied into producing *The Jampot*, the previously excellent magazine of the AJS & Matchless OC. He was also founding editor of *Classic Bike Guide* and has returned as a penance. Or something. He has a mysterious obsession with riding obscure and elderly motorcycles, which he does very slowly…

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