Black & Blue || TWIN TWINS FROM TRIUMPH

CLASSIC BIKE·GUIDE

Electric Star

CUSTOM & CLASSIC

Norton Dominator 99
LITTLE RED ROADSTER

BRITISH BIKE GUIDE INSIDE

BMW R90 SPECIAL || HONDA GOLD WING || LAVERDA 3C

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46664
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27700
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006 **RIDING LIFE**
Show show showtime! We've been busy. Report from Kempton and a Bristol preview too. And there's some news!

010 **SUBSCRIBE!**
Save money, get the magazine early. Thrills beyond description. Maybe

024 **LAVERDA 3C**
No Jota, but maybe better for that

028 **SLIPPERY SAM REP**
Take a Trident. Take off bits, add other bits. Go fast

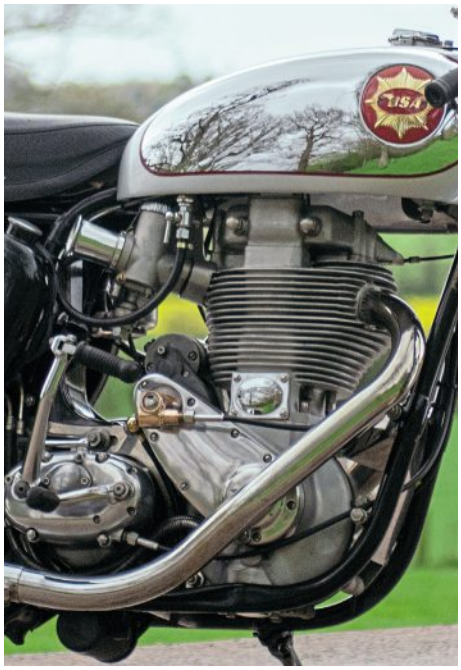
034 **BMW R90 SPECIAL**
Seriously strange way to treat an R90S

040 **HONDA GOLD WING**
Radical then, radical now. Fab flat four

046 **SOME LETTERS**
Laverda, Velocette and the cost of shows

050 **PAUL D'ORLÉANS**
To ball or not to ball?

052 **MARK WILLIAMS**
Serious up-front stuff



054 **PAUL MILES**
Futures for the MoT test

056 **BSA GOLD STAR**
But not entirely as you know it

064 **TRIUMPH TWIN TWINS**
Maybe the best Bonnies ever

078 **NORTON'S DOMINATOR**
Remarkably red, really

086 **CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE**
Ancient Brits galore

100 **SHOCK ABSORBING**
It is possible to refurbish older Japanese shocks, apparently

106 **ARIEL HUNTMASTER**
One man's take on an Ariel twin

112 **READER ADS**
Lock up your wallets

129 **BLONDIE**
by Brett Breckon

130 **FRANK WESTWORTH**
Rising prices, falling brain power

FRANK WESTWORTH

Questions of taste

HERE'S A SIMPLE question for you. Are you a crazy customiser or are you a stock bike stalwart? I bet you're neither. I bet that you're somewhere between the two and that exactly where on the dotted line between custom and stock you'd place yourself depends on the bike in question … and on many other things, too.

Why did Norton ever paint their Dominators red? Every time I see one it somehow manages to look wrong. So I stare at it and scratch my head a little. Which is exactly the point – Norton painted a few of their sturdy Dominators bright red to make them stand out. To make onlookers stop and stare. Because some riders really like that – being stared at. It takes all sorts. I can accept that. Like loud pipes, I can understand why folk fit them, although I'd not do it myself. I prefer to be gone before anyone notices that I was there. Other views are available.

And 'custom' means many things. Take the BSA Gold Star we have on the cover. At a quick glance anyone who knows a little about old bikes recognises at once that yes, there it is, a handsomely shiny and infinitely desirable Gold Star, the crème de la crème to some. Except it's not. It's a custom bike. Read the story to discover exactly how far it is from what it appears to be.

It always amuses me how ready we are to take sides in any discussion. Show season is upon us: I shall be entertained as always by guys telling me how they hate/love custom/concours bikes, or trail bikes, or Chinese bikes or… add your own favourites. And how willing some of us are to escalate a conversation into an argument. It seems crazy to me, but everyone does it – at least, judging by the conversations I share at events. Note that: at events.

Because whenever I meet readers and riders while we're both out there on the road using our wheels for their intended purpose these topics never arise. Hardly ever, anyway. What we discuss then revolves around the weather, our bikes, the weather, our riding gear, the weather, the state of the roads…

That's it. See you out there.

Frank Westworth
editor@classicbikeguide.com

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CLASSIC BIKE INSURANCE?

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- [ ] Politely decline home, pet and travel insurance. Patiently explain that you only need agreed value classic bike insurance. To get off the phone, promise to get a quote for your home "in the near future".
- [ ] Go out to the garage, pull off your bike's cover, snap several photographs. Email photos but hear back that "the photos are too dark" or "we need six and you only sent five".
- [ ] Cough up a £15-50 "certification" fee, on top of your policy premium.
- [ ] Wait on hold half an hour while their staff reviews the information. Lose the connection. Ring back, get transferred to three wrong departments. Get put on hold again.
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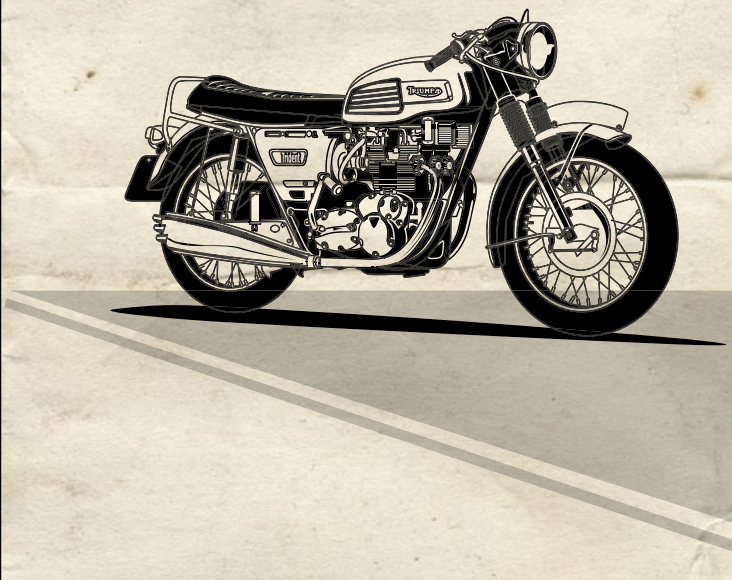

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Beef up your Beezer

WHEN OUR AMERICAN COUSINS say that there ain't no substitute for cubes, they're not normally talking about Oxo. Nope, they're thinking of grunt, not gravy. Increasing a bike's cubic capacity isn't simply about making it go faster, it's all about adding mid-range flexibility and low-rev response. Ride a 500cc Norton Dominator and then an 850cc Norton Commando, and you'll see exactly what we mean.

That's fine and dandy if you happen to be a Norton man or a Triumph fan as both their big twins were built as 750s as standard. But if you're a Beezer geezer then your options are a little limited: the firm's all-round excellent unit construction A65 twin was only ever manufactured in 654cc format. But wait! Is that SRM we can see on the horizon, riding to the rescue?

Indeed it is. SRM have developed a special 750cc big bore conversion kit for A50/A65 models. The cylinders are now manufactured in cast aluminium and have spun-cast iron liners, which reduces their weight to less than half that of a traditional cast iron cylinder. Combined with the increase in the bore, this boosts both power and torque of the A65 engine – and if you want to go even faster then SRM also offer a range of other tuning mods to suit the bigged-up BSA.

The big bore kit also includes both pistons, gudgeon pins and circlips; chrome moly steel high-strength pushrods, high tensile head bolts and a solid copper head gasket. It costs £945 plus VAT and delivery and, of course, there's the small matter of taking your motor apart and putting it all back together. Not the type of job you can easily complete in one weekend but if your A65 needs an engine rebuild anyway…

01970 627771 / srmclassicbikes.com

CAFÉ COOL

IF YOU WANT to give your Hinckley Bonnie a splash of café racer street cred, Motone Customs offer a range of accessories and upgrades to radically transform it from factory standard into something rather more striking. Options include dual seats or solo, humped and stitched saddles; glorious raw aluminium fuel tanks; brushed alloy sidepanels; dinky switchgear and indicators; stylish 'STOP' and tail-lights, all forms of footrest and gear levers and some seriously chunky billet fork braces – once you start browsing, the 'buy now' button is awful tricky to resist.

They've just added a new range of rolled aluminium mudguards. Front ones come in two lengths; shorty or mid-length, while the rear guard is available in a single, tidy, bobbed size, shorter than the standard. The mudguards are either polished to a mirror finish or come in a brushed effect, and they simply bolt on to all modern Bonnies with different versions available for the 2016-onwards models. Front guards cost £89.99 and the rear ones are £139.99.

See motone.co.uk

CLASSICS @ KEMPTON
Off-Road & Racing
P12

BIG TRIPLE
It's no Jota
P24

GOLD STANDARD
Honda's wonder Wing
P40

RACE ROCK 'N' RIDE RETURNS

MAKE A DATE for the weekend of May 20/21, 2017, when Race, Rock 'n' Ride lets rip once again at Santa Pod Raceway. This full-on festival of two-wheeled speed will be an official round of the ACU National Drag Bike championships, which means there will be a whole host of bikes of all shapes and sizes going insanely quickly down the quarter-mile. The 'run what ya brung' category allows have-a-go heroes the chance to test their mettle on the world's most famous drag strip, while iconic classic racebikes will be fired up in the GP paddock – and some classics might brave the timed sprint strip, too.

Other attractions include static displays from bike clubs, runs down the quarter-mile by the thunderous FireForce jet car, Podzilla monster truck demos, the wall of death and trade stalls and high-octane musical entertainment for campers on Saturday night. See racerockride.co.uk

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

IT'S IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS to any old bike rider when a headlamp doesn't work as it should, and night rides suddenly become somewhat stressful. You tend to notice fairly rapidly when you can't see where you're going, but a dying, dimming rear light is rather less apparent to the rider. Being seen from behind, especially when braking, is equally essential for staying safe.

Many classic British bikes from the popular post-war period, when sales boomed from 1955 through to 1970, use the ubiquitous Lucas L564 rear light. It was adequate when new; but can struggle to stand out now against a backdrop of high-intensity halogen or HID lights. Cheap copies of the L564 have long been available but their quality is variable and they tend to be vulnerable to the vibrations which issue forth from most big twins.

Lucas L564 light units are now being manufactured on new tooling to ensure improved quality, and these genuine Lucas components are available from Paul Goff. They're available with standard 6V or 12V bulbs (£34.95 plus delivery), or with extra-bright LED stop/tail-lamps (£47.90 plus delivery). Spare lenses are also available.

Contact 01494 868218 / norbsa02.freeuk.com

C J AUTOS have a new catalogue of restoration kit and garage equipment, available free from 01706 367649. Or check the motorcycle section on their site at cjautos.eu

ONE TO WIN

ENTER THE NATIONAL Motorcycle Museum's current raffle and you could bag a brand-new Bonnie. And it's not any old Bonneville neither, this is an all-singing, dancing and drop-dead delicious Thruxton R, fitted with the factory track racer kit. It's worth almost £14,000 and will be registered for the first time to the lucky raffle winner after the draw at the Stafford Show in April. Second prize is a trad classic AJS Model 18, a beautiful big single from the mid-1950s which, for many folk, epitomises the very best of British biking. Tickets cost £2 each direct from the museum – look out for the NMM stand at events and exhibitions.

Tickets also available from 01675 444123 / thenmm.co.uk

BUILT WITH GRIT!

THE KICKBACK MOTORCYCLE SHOW is dedicated to real-life home-builds and grass-roots grit. It celebrates the best in engineering expertise and daring design, featuring freshly finished café customs, flat-trackers, street scramblers, bobs and chops alongside iconic classics, modified or not. Kickback is all about what individuals want their bikes to be – no big budgets, but lots of efforts and dirty fingernails.

The next Kickback Show takes place at Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire over the weekend of 1-2 April. Some 150 machines, including brats, drag bikes, cool Cubs and rare classics, will be displayed in ample space, allowing spectators to take plenty of photos, get up close, and chat to the owners and builders. Look out for more magnificent machines on the special displays from the Pendine Landspeed Racing Club, Coventry Speedway and Langport Bike Night.

Discounted tickets and further info at TheCustomShow.com

TRIUMPH SPARES ONLINE

HALF A CENTURY after Supreme Motorcycles started trading, the Leicester-based Triumph specialist shut up shop for the final time at the end of last year. However, their regular customers need not despair – classic specialists Draganfly have bought the stock and are expanding their range to cover all pre-unit and unit construction Triumph twins. This acquisition adds more than 4500 new product lines to Draganfly's warehouse in Suffolk – so far it's taken them some two months to make space on the shelves for all the spare parts…

Draganfly expect to have the Triumph spares organised alongside their existing Ariel and BSA ranges by February. The Triumph twin components will be available for worldwide mail order via a new section in the Draganfly online shop, with the facility to search by part number or description with stock levels displayed alongside the prices.

See dragonfly.co.uk

A LEVER LONG ENOUGH

IDEAL FOR SAVING SPACE on a custom build, Magura's Retro 225 master cylinder and lever replacement kits are compact all-in-one units. They're a high quality alternative for classic restoration projects, and are also ideal for bike builders who want to replace the cumbersome standard hydraulic clutch and/or braking systems with something that suits a stripped-down theme.

The 225 brake kit comes with a polished lever, black-painted housing, fluid reservoir and a 22mm clamp which fits most standard handlebars. It's pre-threaded for a brake light switch and rear-view mirror, and is available in 13mm and 16mm piston versions at £112.15. The 225 clutch master cylinder costs the same and similarly comes as a complete kit. If your bike uses a cable-operated clutch, there's a Magura lever which matches the 225 brake lever at £43.

See venhill.co.uk

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066974KITNN	88, 99, 650 - 1960 ONWARDS - PRE ENG 125871	£72
067942KITNN	MERCURY & 650SS - AFTER ENG 125871	£66
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060289ASSNN	COMMANDO REAR - BOLT-UP STAINLESS STEEL	£88
060289ACSSNN	COMMANDO REAR CUSH STAINLESS	£91
060289ANN	COMMANDO REAR - BOLT-UP	£55
060289ACNN	COMMANDO REAR - CUSH HUBS	£46
065553ANN	COMMANDO MK3 REAR - PLATED	£39
065553ASSNN	COMMANDO MK3 REAR - STAINLESS BUT STUB STD	£64

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064079ANN	COMMANDO PRE MK2 0.005" OVERSIZE	£56
065055ANN	COMMANDO MK2 0.010" OVERSIZE	£56
060453ANN	COMMANDO PRE MK2A	£56
065053ANN	COMMANDO MK2A	£56
065053ASSNN	COMMANDO MK2A STAINLESS ENDS	£64
065054ANN	COMMANDO MK2A 0.005" OVERSIZE	£56
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C=Commando, D=Dominator, L=Lightweight Twin & S= Single

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Off-road & racing

WORDS BY IEISH GAMAH
PHOTOS BY IEISH GAMAH & MAUROCARRAROPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

AMONG THE MANY enjoyable aspects of owning, riding and fettling motorcycles, meandering around bike jumbles and shows gives the rider/restorer two opportunities: to secure parts or inspiration for future projects or the next purchase. The Southern Classic Shows at Kempton Park combine both activities and allow visitors to stock up on useful bits and pieces and wander around the show hall containing some tremendous machines. The two aspects of the day – show and jumble – mesh together well, but could equally and happily stand alone. At times throughout the day, the two events had a distinctly separate feel to them.

The December day dawned bright, clear and somewhat crisp, ensuring that the hot drink and snack vendors did a roaring trade, warming up the crowds attending the event. Those wanting to get a head start on the bargains had the option of an 'early bird' ticket which gives access to the showground from 7.45am, an opportunity that saw attendees getting the march on some stallholders.

In addition to tyres and tinware, the large autojumble offered a good range of merchandise, from reprinted owners' manuals, motorcycle clothing old and new, shed clear-outs, to garden ornaments, albeit vaguely vehicular. There was also some intriguing individual and dealer machinery for sale, and everything from rusty step-thrus to a blown floral chopper could be had for the right price.

EVENT SHOW REPORT

THE NEXT Southern Classic Motorcycle Show is on Saturday, May 20. See kemptonparkautojumble.co.uk

A number of clubs put on displays, alongside professional workshops and small manufacturers and single owner exhibits. The London Motorcycle Museum was also in attendance, with pride of place on their stand going to a much modified Rickman Métisse Triumph. This gleaming blue rarity doubtless possessed the assured handling and sharp Lockheed braking experienced by your reporter years ago – both were a definite improvement over some major manufacturers' offerings of the time.

There was certainly a wide range of machines, in an even wider range of conditions, to tickle the imagination and tempt the fettler. From a rather non-standard BSA and a frame-up Suzuki T500 restoration (missing just a few parts, but at least you could easily examine the conrods), to some ready to

ride away, beautifully presented P&Js, there really was something for everyone. The wide remit of the show brings together a fascinating and extensive range of machines not normally seen under the same roof, along with some delightful stock and special motorcycles including replica racers and ISDT entrants to early 20th century road rarities.

BMW RACER

THE SIDECAR OUTFIT named 'A Blast From The Past' sounded exceptionally civilised during the lunchtime run-up session, with a refined but rorty engine note that could only be a race-tuned BMW twin. Utilising a 750cc engine, the Willie Moore-built project was completed a couple of years ago as a replica of a 1960s GP kneeler. Then last year the machine was adapted to suit a sitting riding position. The build features 16 inch wheels on the cycle with a 10 inch sidecar set up. Stopping power is via twin discs with a hydraulic brake line to the chair.

NORTON V8

OCCASIONALLY A SHOW exhibit will stop you in your tracks with its sheer engineering craftsmanship. John Crudginton's beautiful home-built and designed Norton Atlas V8 project does exactly that, with a level of mechanical audacity which has you peering at each and every intricacy.

Seemingly impossibly shoehorned into a standard Featherbed frame you find the all-alloy engine – and what an engine it is. The builder has taken two Reliant Robin alloy blocks and welded them together, with a half-inch offset for the rods, giving an overall capacity of 1700cc. Other engine internals are standard, with no additional tuning. As with any adventurous design, there were a few wrinkles to iron out, including unwelcome fuel vaporisation in the fuel pump located between the blocks.

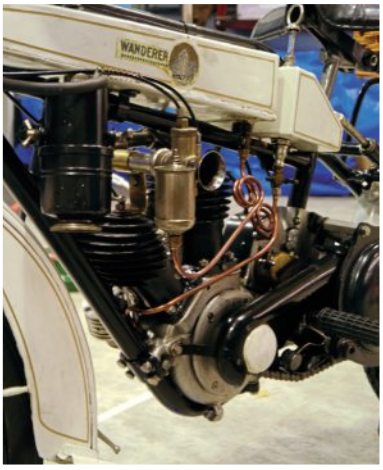
Home-manufactured yokes and an oval swinging arm, Burman gearbox and modified 1100cc Yamaha clutch complete this truly stunning and eye-catching project. That 180-degree crank arrangement reputedly gives it a similar sound to 'a 1963/64 Coventry Climax F1 engine'.

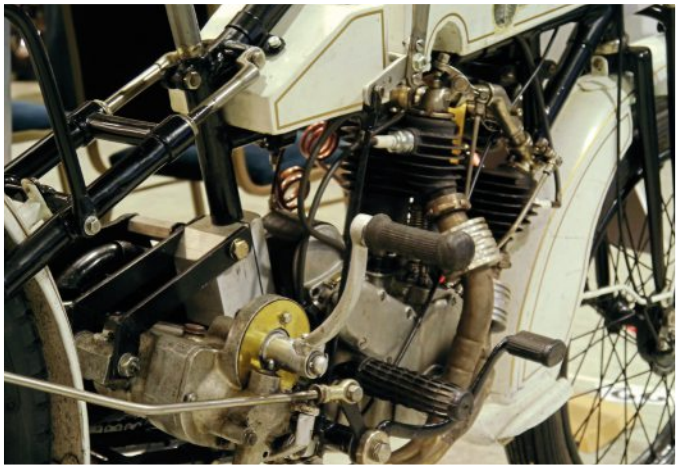
ISDT ARIEL

ANOTHER RARE GEM on display was Tony Pegler's 498cc 1952 Ariel, one of three works bikes built to compete in the Austrian ISDT that year. The new-for-1953 alloy-engined KHA was ridden at Bad Aussee by the British team captain Bob Ray; he secured a gold medal for his personal performance although the team finished in a disappointing third place. Ariel's sponsored team fared rather better the following year in Czechoslovakia, where this bike once again cleared the course to win a gold medal and Ariel took the manufacturer's team prize.

As with many works specials, the bike boasts a number of mods, including oil damped rear suspension. Road-going versions of the KHA were sold with 6.8:1 compression pistons, giving 28bhp at 6200rpm on standard petrol. Where 80 octane fuel was available for competition use, 7.5:1 pistons could be fitted to push the power output over the 30bhp boundary.

1913 WANDERER

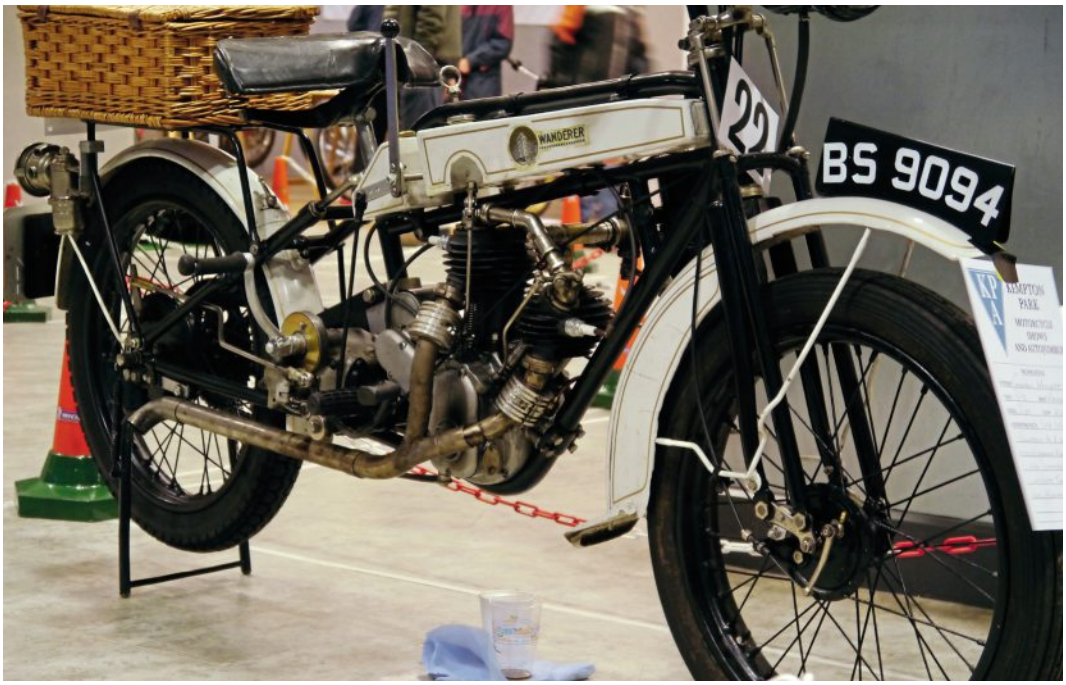




ONLY FOUR OF these 408cc V-twins are known to exist today, two of them in museums. This particular delightfully patinated example showcases the model's innovative features, and has undergone a series of modifications over its long life. A German company, Wanderer produced ground-breaking machines from 1902 in a variety of capacities and cylinder layouts, with unit construction, shaft drive, front and rear suspension and even an eight-valve twin as early as 1910. After Wanderer fell victim to the 1920s depression, the name was sold to F Janacek of Prague who combined both names, creating JAWA.

The 3hp model exhibited at Kempton was originally a single-speed machine, but has been fitted with a 1920s Indian clutch and gearbox. This modification dated back at least 50 years, according to the owner's research and, in order to achieve this alteration, the tanks were separated to fit the gearchange lever. At around the same time, 19-inch front wheels were fitted, with 5-inch drum brakes. The owner suggests that these major adjustments were undertaken to make the machine 'more rider friendly.' The original auto inlet valves have also been cleverly converted to an IOE (inlet over exhaust) layout at some point. The IOE design facilitates an improved combustion chamber shape.

This machine spent some time in the Eastern Bloc, before being sold by Bonhams first in 1995 and then again in 2005. The current owner purchased the Wanderer at the end of 2014, aiming to get it up and running for the 2016 Banbury Run. This was achieved by completing an extensive list of repairs and refurbishments, including fitting a Burman three-speed gearbox, clutch and kick-start, sorting out the gearing, repairing and realigning the frame, rebuilding the fork linkage, sourcing a magneto which was modified for a 42-degree V-angle, as well as spending countless hours adjusting the valve and ignition timing, undertaking shakedown trials and spending a year to actually get the machine sufficiently fettled to power a rider along.



Given its rarity, the owner's initial idea of restoring the Wanderer to its original spec has proved somewhat more difficult – there aren't even any original parts readily available to use as patterns to manufacture replacements. The bike does however still sport its original tinware, leading link front forks with their concealed springs, engine and sprung frame, with its innovative rear pivoted sub-frame.

SUZUKI BANDIT

THE MODERN WAVE of café customs was stylishly represented by Matt Coulter's 1996 Suzuki Bandit build. Taken out to 1216cc, it develops between 250 and 290bhp achieved by means of a Fastbyme turbo kit comprising a billet block hybrid turbo fitted with Hayabusa pistons and rods. The machine also sported GSX-R forks, Harris yokes, and a set of custom-made Talon Engineering wheels. The overall mean and moody composition was finished off with a Triumph seat unit and bespoke seat.

BRT SPECIALS

BRT RACING ARE a father and son team of Neil and Martin, who run classic machines on a non-commercial, non-sponsored basis. They fund and hand-build all of their machines from scratch, and race, show and parade their stable at every opportunity. Neil started racing in 1966 on a 'rather slow Triumph 350 and soon progressed to an ex-works Derek Minter 250 Cotton, which was fitted with a Gardner carb and was extremely fast, though prone to breakdowns'. This same machine unfortunately spat him off in 'a big way' at Lydden Circuit in 1969.

After accompanying his father to many classic races throughout his childhood, watching the racing and helping out in the pits, Martin now races their collection alongside his father. This motorcycle collection currently comprises a wide range of marques and capacities, including the Seeley Commando seen here. The 850 motor is of 1974 vintage with race cams, 'lots of lightened and polished bits inside', and twin 32mm Amal performance carbs. The original four-speed AMC gearbox has been replaced with a modern five-speed racing gearbox from Mick Hemmings.

That little lot lives inside a 2015 Mk3 Seeley frame, built under licence by Roger Titchmarsh using the original jigs. The forks and 230mm double-sided 2ls front brake are from Ceriani; the rear brake started out as a Triumph conical item which has been drilled and fitted with a cooling ring, Manx-style. The custom-made exhausts were fabricated at home, with removable baffles to let the bike perform at its best at unrestricted races.

Alongside the Seeley stood a second BRT special, a three-cylinder Triton which took six months to build last winter. This included the entire engine strip and rebuild, with all-new bearings and oil seals, and every nut, bolt and washer replaced with stainless steel. The Triumph T150 lump was taken out to 850cc and given high-comp pistons, a high pressure oil pump, race cams and a five-speed gearbox. Primary drive is through a Les Whiston belt drive. The frame came from a 1959 Norton Dominator – delugged, and with new brackets welded where necessary with custom-made engine plates.

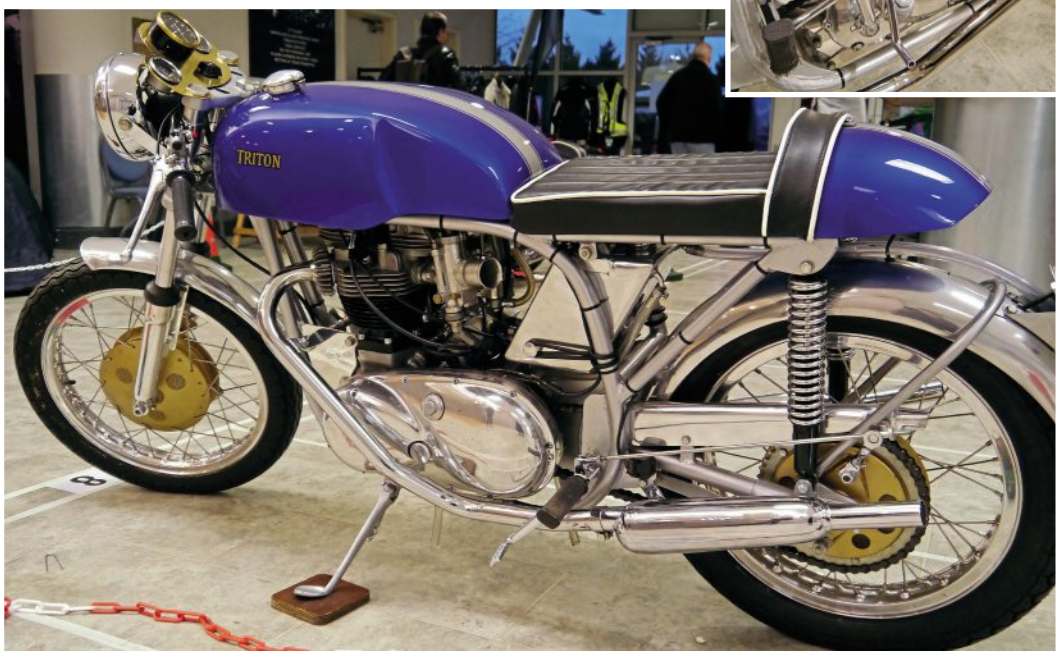
The Roadholder forks are held by John Tickle yokes, and the front brake is another Ceriani double-side 2ls drum. In a couple of nifty touches, carb operation has been improved with a modified 'centre pull' gantry, and the

coils now live above the engine, fixed to the headsteady brackets. The bespoke exhaust system kicks up at the back in a unique 'fan' of three reverse-cone silencers – this is one bike you'll definitely recognise when it overtakes you on the track!

OXNEY TRITONS

THE OXNEY MOTORCYCLES display of traditional-style Tritons seemed guaranteed to slow the steps of those passers-by who favour conventional café racers. The two sparkling (but not overly brash) examples were both built up using period parts in an 'old time workshop', and were very much a pleasant melding of trad and modern styles and fabrication techniques.

The 1959 650cc model sported an Eddie Dow 2LS front brake (albeit in need of shoes) and a twin carb, cast iron head. Rear stopping power was via an Oxney Manx Norton rear hub, and the whole effect was completed with a home-made seat unit. The 1960 bike also utilised the oft-favoured 650 Triumph twin engine, which was slotted into a period racing frame. Fuel is funnelled via two NOS GP2 carbs and, as with its 1959 stablemate, this machine was completed with a bespoke seat, housing the battery in the rear cowling. A nicely fabricated home-made tank completed the neat appearance.



Draganfly Motorcycles

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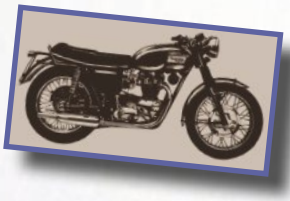

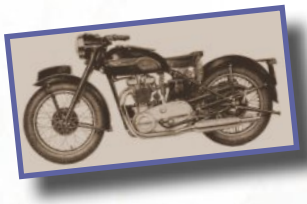

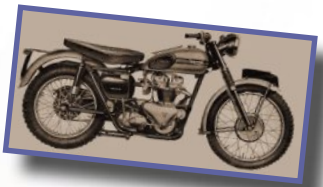

ALL pre-unit and unit Twins!

Eh? How's this come about?

Supreme Motorcycles has been bought by Draganfly, who will now cater to all Supreme customers. After moving over 30 crateloads of stock, our shelves are bursting at the seams! We can provide for more makes than ever before!

We plan to add a whole new Triumph section on our website, laid out the same way as the Ariel & BSA sections. This will be updated regularly, so check back often!

Read the full scoop below...

SUPREME motor cycles ltd

A new chapter

Fifty years after opening its doors, Supreme Motorcycles of Leicester are ceasing trading. Run by Heather and Dave Hallam and Dave Coley, Supreme specialised in spares for Triumphs and late BSAs, with a top notch service and wealth of experience to back up their thousands of product lines. The two Daves, both renowned sidecar race winners in the TT, UK and European races, are looking forward to their retirement after many years of service to vintage British bikes, Draganfly Motorcycles is looking forward to carrying on their work.

Ariel and BSA specialists Draganfly recently bought Supreme and, as a result, their stock will expand to cover all pre-unit and unit Triumph Twins. The acquisition will add more than 4,500 new product lines to the Suffolk-based spares emporium. The last two months have been spent reorganising, rearranging and generally making space on the Draganfly shelves to house the new Triumph parts!

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PACK-START-005

Triumph is not an entirely alien make to the guys and gals at Drags, as the Midlands-based manufacturer had a lot in common with Draganflys first love, Ariel. Industrialist, and all-round motorbike fan, Jack Sangster owned both Ariel and Triumph at one point, with some of the same designers working for both makes throughout the years. The Ariel and Triumph girder fork models even share some essential parts and it goes without saying that BSA and Triumph have a lot in common too!

We hope to be ready to serve Triumph owners in early February, with a brand new section in our online shop dedicated to the brand if all goes to plan. Search by part number or description and Triumph spares, with stock levels and prices, should appear! We look forward to taking Supreme Motorcycles under the Draganfly wing and welcoming their customers with the same level of service and quality that Dave and Dave have done for the past fifty years.

Lauren Gwynn

So call, visit or check the website for all your classic motorcycle spares.

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EVENT SHOW PREVIEW

THE 37TH CAROLE NASH BRISTOL 2017 CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE SHOW

That Brough, at Bristol

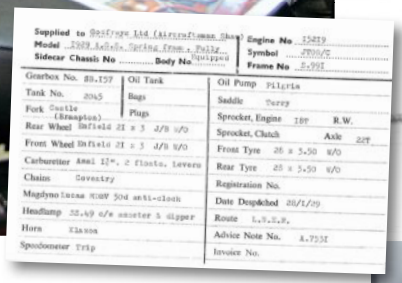
The Carole Nash Bristol Classic MotorCycle Show always hosts some of Britain's best classic bikes. This year there's something extra-special on display at the Royal Bath and West Showground

THE COMBINATION OF TE Lawrence and Brough Superior has to be among the most famous partnerships in motorcycling history, and it's one that will be celebrated at the South West's biggest annual bike show. On the weekend of February 4/5, visitors to the Carole Nash-sponsored Bristol classic event get the chance to see the SS100 owned and ridden by the famous author and military officer who earned the moniker 'Lawrence of Arabia' for his role as a diplomat during Arab conflicts of the First World War.

Above: There's always masses of stuff to do at Bristol!

Below: Superb club stands have always been a noted Bristol feature

Named 'George VI' by Lawrence, the bike registered as UL656 was used between January 1929 and 1932 and is one of just two Broughs which can definitely be identified as his. The other is GW2275, the motorcycle that Lawrence traded in UL656 to buy and on which he was fatally injured. Apparently bought for him by friends – including George Bernard Shaw and his wife Charlotte – the Brough was Lawrence's first sprung-framed SS100 and also the first to feature the 998cc JTO-series JAP V-twin engine.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Rear Wheel Enfield 21 x 3 S/B W/O | Sprocket, Clutch Axle 22T
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VISITOR INFO & TICKETS

DISCOUNTED ADVANCE TICKETS for the show are on sale until 11.59pm on Sunday, January 29, with a one-day adult pass costing £11 and a one-day senior citizen pass costing just £9. The same tickets can be bought on the gate for £13 and £11, respectively. The auction hall is open for viewing on Saturday, but entry on Sunday is by catalogue only, which costs £10 and allows admission for two.

Tickets and further details from 01507 529529/classicbikeshows.com

In Lawrence of Arabia – the epic film of TE's life – number UL656 was incorrectly used as the motorcycle which was involved in Lawrence's fatal crash, and it was also fitted with a Matchless sidevalve motor and not the JAP ohv engine as it should have been. The original, authentic UL656 will be displayed at the Royal Bath and West showground during the Bristol Show, having recently been renovated. It's now in a roadworthy condition and running for the first time in about 60 years.

The famous Brough will be among many individual motorcycles to be stationed in the halls ready for inspection, with some 40 private entries going under the watchful eyes of showgoers and event judges. Although the Lawrence of Arabia bike might steal the headlines, the Bristol Show is famed for the efforts of local clubs and we expect that there will once again be some elaborate exhibitions which showcase some fine examples of pioneer, veteran, vintage and classic motorcycles.

No classic event would be complete without a healthy selection of trade stands offering bargains on all manner of parts, spares and accessories, with the show also housing a huge motorcycle autojumble.

Rounding off proceedings will be Charterhouse's classic motorcycle sale, with a 1967 RAF police bike among the many notable lots. The BSA B40 was bought as a retirement project by its current owner and features the correct and rare original fairing, blue light, higher handlebars and RAF blue saddlebags. It is fitted with a 350cc engine and is estimated to reach between £5000 and £6000. CBG

Above right: Star of the show may well be this very Brough Superior, seen here with George Brough and TE Lawrence – and nearby should be a copy of the build record from the factory. Powerful provenance or what?

Right: There'll be something in the jumble for everyone…

Below: A little too young to attract the eye of aircraftsman Shaw, but a fine example of a WD B40 BSA in RAF trim all the same. See it in the auction

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Ducati 900SS 1976, period endurance bike ... £37,500

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Lively Laverda

Power and speed with rock steady handling

WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Laverdas are often brightly coloured but more subtle palettes are available. This one's not actually monochrome, just a very pale blue

1: Neat handle for lifting onto the centrestand, simple shock adjustment too

2: A common mod was drilling out the solid discs for better water displacement in the wet; the discs are cast iron and will rust

3: ND clocks are clear and steady. We always wonder what happens once you're past the red line?

4: Tremendous engine. Major castings boast wide joint faces to keep the oil within

LAVERDA HAD ITS ORIGINS in rugged tractors and combine harvesters, so it's little wonder that their motorcycles are equally well engineered. Solid, reliable, durable and dependable, with top quality components, Laverda's twins and triples exhibit the same design strengths as their agricultural predecessors.

Following the Second World War, Francesco Laverda began designing motorcycle engines, and Moto Laverda started production in earnest in 1950. A student of thermodynamics, Francesco created small capacity, high performance engines which successfully avoided the cooling issues commonly encountered in Italy's sunny climate. He spent two decades creating reliable, affordable commuter transport, building a solid reputation for durable, low maintenance machines.

Moto Laverda believed in serious product testing, both on and off road. Competing in endurance races, long distance races, hill climbs and time trials enabled them to test, hone and improve their bikes. Strength, performance, handling and reliability, rather than pure speed, provided a phenomenal string of wins which raised their profile and placed Laverda firmly in the eye of the buying public.

By the mid-1960s, Massimo Laverda had taken the reins as general manager. Dwindling sales of their small capacity machines led him to America to investigate the market and determine Laverda's future direction. A bigger, sportier model was required, so a 650 twin was developed in an effort to take on the British, BMW, Moto Guzzi and the Japanese. Laverda's 650 prototype debuted in 1966, was launched in 1968, and the 750SF followed shortly afterwards, being developed in tandem with their 750SFC racer.

Laverda unveiled their 1000cc triple prototype in 1969 and, following some design changes, the first batch of about two hundred 3Cs were released in 1972. Laverda's 981cc 3C triple has a 180-degree engine which gives it a very distinctive and addictive off-beat sound. The 180-degree engine was developed to avoid the rocking vibration induced by 120-degree inline triples.

In the 180-degree engines the outer two cylinders' pistons are up when the middle cylinder's piston is down and vice versa. Once the first cylinder fires the crankshaft rotates 180 degrees then the middle cylinder fires. After another 180-degree rotation the third cylinder fires but it's a further 360-degree rotation before the first cylinder fires again. So the engine tickover sounds off-beat and irregular, as it's a

four-stroke cycle with three firing pulses, then a gap before the cycle starts again.

In later models a 120-degree engine was used. After the first cylinder fires, the crankshaft rotates 240 degrees then the middle cylinder fires. The crankshaft rotates another 240 degrees and the third cylinder fires, and so on. This gives a smoother tickover as the firing cycle is more evenly balanced, but the crankshaft is rocked by the force of the pistons rising and falling, which can lead to the crankshaft fracturing in extreme circumstances. In any case, Laverda rubber mounted the engines to prevent vibes tiring the rider and damaging the bike.

These substantial machines are deliberately over-engineered throughout to withstand vibration and stress. From the heavy gauge tubular duplex steel frames, to engines with five large bearings on the crankshaft alone, everything is very thick metal but extremely well made. The sand-cast engine casings are decently thicker than those of Triumph and other contemporaries. This avoided issues with porous casings and oil leaks but added considerably to the weight, with the 3C weighing in at 472lb.

Built with an emphasis on enjoyment, the 80bhp 3Cs were seriously sporty, with a top speed of over 130mph. Exceptional handling was attributed to the rigidity of the hefty frames, Ceriani racing forks, Borrani wheel rims and Ceriani touring suspension. The first batch were fitted with Laverda's own 2ls drum brakes, however they were found to be slightly lacking when it came to stopping the machine's speed and mass. This 3C is one of the next batch of 1000 built, and is fitted with solid Brembo twin discs.

PRICE GUIDE

£8000 to £12,000

FAULTS & FOIBLES

The standard cable clutch is heavy but hydraulic conversions are available. Height and weight can rule out the bikes for shorter riders. A lot of 3Cs fell prey to owners upgrading them to Jota spec, so they are now relatively rare in their original form

ALSO CONSIDER

Laverda Jota (more ££, more extreme). Moto Guzzi Le Mans 1000 (more choice, less cash, one less cylinder). Yamaha XS750/850 (underrated touring triple, half the price)

SPECIALISTS

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BUY IT NOW

Recently imported from Europe, this 3C has covered 23,276 miles and still has the hard-to-find large Bosch headlight lens, Voxbell horns and correct double-seamed exhausts as well as the very practical Witt ignition system. Full MoT, £13,999 from motocorsa.co.uk

It has been with its current owner for about a year.

Massimo was determined that only the best would do, so, rather unusually, Laverda bought in components to avoid the problems and failings associated with other Italian machines of the time. Initially the switchgear came from Lucas in England, electrics came courtesy of Bosch in Germany and Japan's Nippon Denso supplied the clocks. Presumably a standard face was used on the tacho, as the red zone starts at 6500rpm but finishes at 7500rpm, while the dial goes all the way up to 11,000rpm. Period road tests anticipated 130mph at about 7500rpm and foresaw no problem in exceeding this for short periods.

1: Three pots, twin horns. Testers loved the volume of the twin hooters

2: Laverda's own fully adjustable handlebars offer a choice of positions

3: A lot of 3Cs fell prey to owners keen to improve them to Jota spec so they are now relatively rare in their original form

Early 3Cs featured a Bosch headlight with a 40W bulb. Reviews criticised the lack of illumination at night so they were soon replaced by an H4 halogen bulb.

It's not unusual for Laverdas to possess components which are a variation on that year's model, reflecting the flexible low-volume production methods of the era. For example, 3C sales brochures show machines with disc brakes but list drum brakes in the specification. Laverda introduced their trademark fully adjustable handlebars in 1973, enabling a wide range of riding positions from café racer to upright. Rider footrests were similarly adjustable, while the pillion rests were mainly beefy and uncluttered. This was also the first year that Suzuki rather than Lucas switchgear was used.

Late 1974 models sported an oil cooler, perhaps not so necessary in the UK but a good thing in sunnier climes. Early models don't have an oil filter; just a gauze in the sump which needs to be cleaned periodically, and as ever regular oil changes are key to longevity.

Slater Brothers, the UK importer, created the 3CE (E for England) variant with its single seat. The most significant changes came with the 3CL which featured five-spoke cast wheels, a tail piece and disc brakes all round. Slaters took the opportunity to tune up the 1000 and created the now legendary Jota – aptly named after a Spanish dance in 3-4 time, a reference to the engine's firing sequence, maybe.

This Laverda's current owner is lucky enough to be able to compare the 3C and the Jota. He reckons the 3C is "more mild mannered and probably a more pleasant ride. The Jota is great over 70 but a bit rough below; the 3C is more torquey and will pull from 30mph in top gear. The Jota has a high lift camshaft making it racier and more suited to high speed riding, conversely it's less happy with lower speed or town riding."

He advises that the bike's weight is something to be wary of, particularly with the Jota. If you go into a corner too fast, and attempt to throttle off, then it's easy to become unstuck, but if you keep the throttle pinned it'll generally sort itself out. In his view, Laverdas handle better than their Japanese contemporaries. Now that sounds like a challenge... CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1972-1975 **ENGINE:** DOHC transverse air-cooled four-stroke triple **BORE / STROKE:** 75 x 74mm **CAPACITY:** 981cc **COMPRESSION:** 9:1 **POWER:** 80bhp @ 7250rpm **CARBURETTOR:** 3x 32mm Dell'Orto PHF carburettors **IGNITION:** Bosch electronic with three coils **LIGHTING:** Bosch 12V **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump, gear pump **CLUTCH:** Wet multi-plate **GEARBOX:** Five-speed **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Triplex chain in oil bath **FINAL DRIVE:** Chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 2x 11-inch Brembo discs **REAR BRAKE:** 230mm 2ls drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Ceriani tele forks, hydraulically damped **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, adjustable twin shocks **FRONT TYRE:** 4.10 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 4.25 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 1486mm **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 5.5 inches **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32.5 inches **WEIGHT:** 472lb **ACCELERATION:** 0 to 60 mph in 6.5 seconds **STANDING QUARTER MILE:** 13.0 seconds **BRAKING:** 29.8ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 133mph **PRICE NEW:** £1800

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Leak-free legend

The replica racer that gives triple thrills without tantrums

WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: The fairing hides the engine, but there's no mistaking a Slippery Sam replica. This bike's paintwork comes courtesy of Airbrush Antics

1: The three cylinders are fed by three Amal carbs, operated by a single cable. These carbs are also fitted with chokes, in an attempt at easing the starting

2: The gear lever has been reversed to suit the rear-set rests, and the T160 kick-start lever is not entirely the easiest way of starting a cold engine

3: Racing crouch. Obligatory, etc

4: In case you'd forgotten, these are the fables ray guns. No other manufacturer has dared to copy them

IN 1971 DAVID BOWIE wrote Moonage Daydream and sang 'Put your ray gun to my head'. It's almost certain that he wasn't influenced by the distinctive silencers on Triumph's legendary three-cylinder racer, but that must have been how the competition felt every time 'Slippery Sam' won yet again.

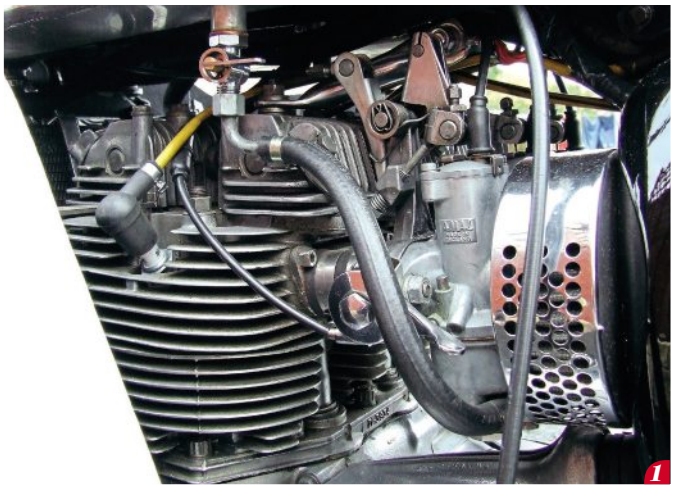
In a bid to stay ahead of the Japanese and boost sales in 1969, Triumph made a deliberate move away from twins and onto something fresh and new. Chief engineer Doug Hele was instrumental in creating the distinctive Triumph Trident and BSA Rocket 3 racing triples using a frame designed by Midlands frame specialist Rob North.

In 1970 three production bikes were prepared by the Triumph factory for the Isle of Man TT Production 750 class. One ridden by the aptly named Malcolm Uphill won the race lapping at 97.71mph. The bike destined to become known as Slippery Sam, ridden by Tom Dickie, finished fourth after a reportedly awkward Le Mans style start as Tom wasn't accustomed to the triple.

Slippery Sam was christened following the 1970 Bol d'Or 24 hour endurance race for production based bikes, when teething problems caused both bike and riders to be plastered in oil. Tom Dickie and Paul Smart won the race at Montlhéry on a similarly prepared works Trident, and Slippery Sam, ridden by Percy Tait and Steve Jolly, managed a very respectable fifth place despite being covered in oil.

Once the oil issue was rectified, Sam went on to achieve a phenomenal string of five consecutive TT wins, the only bike ever to do so. In 1971 Ray Pickrell won the Production 750 with a 100.07mph fastest lap, and then again Ray won the following year with a fastest lap of 100.01mph. Sam was prepared by Triumph engineer, race shop foreman and race team manager Les Williams and his team.

Les bought Slippery Sam from Triumph/BSA at the end of the race season in 1972 and continued to dominate the Production 750 class, with Tony Jeffries winning in 1973 at 95.62mph. In 1974, possibly in an effort to break the 741cc Slippery Sam's monopoly at the TT and give other marques a chance, the class was opened right up to production machines of up to 1000cc; yet Slippery Sam remained invincible in 1974 with Mick Grant



at 99.72mph. In 1975 Sam won yet again with Dave Croxford and Alex George at 99.60mph, Alex also secured the fastest individual lap average at 102.82mph. Slippery Sam had proved unbeatable and may have continued for several more years, but following the 1975 TT a new rule was introduced excluding machines over five years old and Slippery Sam was reluctantly retired.

Les was undeterred and built Son of Sam, a T160 production racer which won the 1000cc class at the 1976 John Player Grand Prix at Silverstone.

When Triumph collapsed Les set up his own business, LP Williams (still going strong today with Phil Bargh at the helm), employing some of his former Triumph experimental department colleagues. As well as supplying spares for Tridents and the equally successful BSA Rocket 3s, they created a couple of dozen Slippery Sam replicas. These mainly used T160s as a basis; only three are known to have been fitted with T150 engines.

The previous owner of the machine featured here was a friend of Les Williams. He bought a T150V, stripped it and took it to Les to work his magic and transform it from a roadbike to a racing replica. The engine was rebuilt to race spec; oil flow has been significantly increased by drilling the oilways (the later T160s had an enlarged oil feed to the oil pump); the race pipes curve neatly in and under, out of the way to increase clearance and air flow; the gear change has been reversed and, very importantly, it has absolutely no oil leaks.

After many years the T150 changed hands and unfortunately was wrongly wired up by someone with little knowledge of British bikes who took it to be negative earth. Using the wrong polarity resulted in an electrical fire which burnt out the loom. The bike subsequently required a complete rewire and a fair bit of TLC to get it back on the road. Luckily Duncan was the man for the job and he's owned this Slippery Sam replica for about seven years. It's a standard Les Williams build, with clip-ons, and has covered around 5000 miles since it was built.

PRICE GUIDE

From £5000 (home-built replica)
To £20,000 (genuine Les Williams-built replica)

FAULTS & FOIBLES

Race-spec replicas can make for uncompromising, demanding road bikes. Check whether any prospective purchase has been raced recently in classic events. If considering a 1970s L P Williams machine, look for an unbroken paper-trail which records ownership from its build to the current day, ideally with authentication from the TR3OC

ALSO CONSIDER

Rob North Triumph Trident or BSA Rocket 3

SPECIALISTS

L P Williams: triumph-spares.co.uk

OWNERS' CLUB

Trident and Rocket 3: tr3oc.com

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Offered for just under £19k at The Bike Specialists in Yorkshire, this is a 1976-era Slippery Sam replica which has been in a private collection for the past five years. It's covered just 7147 miles, with five previous owners, and is listed as a T160, built by Les Williams

1

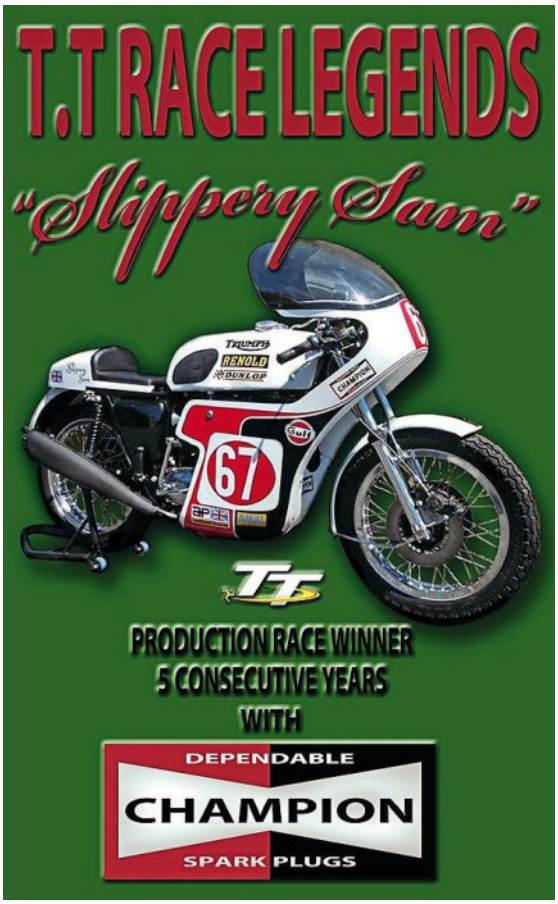
2

3

1: Racing engines deserve racing brakes. The twin disc set-up is rather better than the original

2: Oil cooler and a pair of Zener diodes control heat from various sources

3: It looks so innocent in white. Until it fires up, when the true naughty nature is revealed



MANUFACTURED: 1972 to 1974 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv triple **BORE / STROKE:** 67mm x 70.5mm **CAPACITY:** 741cc **COMPRESSION:** 10.5:1 **POWER:** 75bhp **CARBURETTOR:** 3 x Amals rejetted for race exhaust system **IGNITION:** Lucas Rita **LIGHTING:** H4 headlamp and Lucas high output 3-phase alternator **LUBRICATION:** Uprated Les Williams oil pump **CLUTCH:** Dry single-plate modified race clutch **GEARBOX:** Five-speed **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Modified chain **FINAL DRIVE:** Chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 2x discs, Grimeca calipers, Lockheed master cylinder **REAR BRAKE:** Triumph drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic forks with race springs **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shock modified Girlings **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 4.10 x 19 **TOP SPEED:** 125mph-plus

Duncan describes it as an exciting ride – a race bike for the road. It sounds lovely, he says, the noise it makes is ridiculous: it's obvious that in Duncan's life, triples equate to massively big grins. The Slippery Sam replica has great handling, complimented by the extra front disc which significantly improves braking over the standard road bike's single disc. This T150 has been fitted with a Lucas Rita electronic ignition system which makes getting the ignition timing right a whole lot easier than setting up three sets of points. In theory, it should also aid starting, but the cylinder head has been gas-flowed and skimmed. With high compression pistons and a real tendency to kick back, this Sam really needs to be started with rollers. It's much better for the rider's well-being to start it with a rolling road, as there's a clip-on located right in line with your knee so a broken knee cap is a real danger if it kicks back!

Unusually, this homage to the original Sam sports black exhaust pipes, rather than the chrome ray-gun silencers more commonly seen on BSA's Rocket 3. Under the seat hump there's plenty of space for waterproofs or your sarnies. This space is obviously not reserved for tools or spare parts as Triumphs are 100% reliable and don't break down (ahem). The subtle yet distinctive 'five times TT winning' decal is displayed on the rear hump just so there is no doubt as to its heritage.

You can build your own Slippery Sam replica if you have a suitable donor bike. Full conversion kits are no longer easily available, however many individual components can still be sourced from LP Williams. Alternatively, it's worth keeping an eye out for one of the stunning replicas which occasionally are offered for sale. These can be genuine Les Williams-build with the race-tuned engine (it's worth doing your homework to check that these are the real deal), or home-builds. The latter may not have the same level of performance but can be a lot easier to start and live with! CBG

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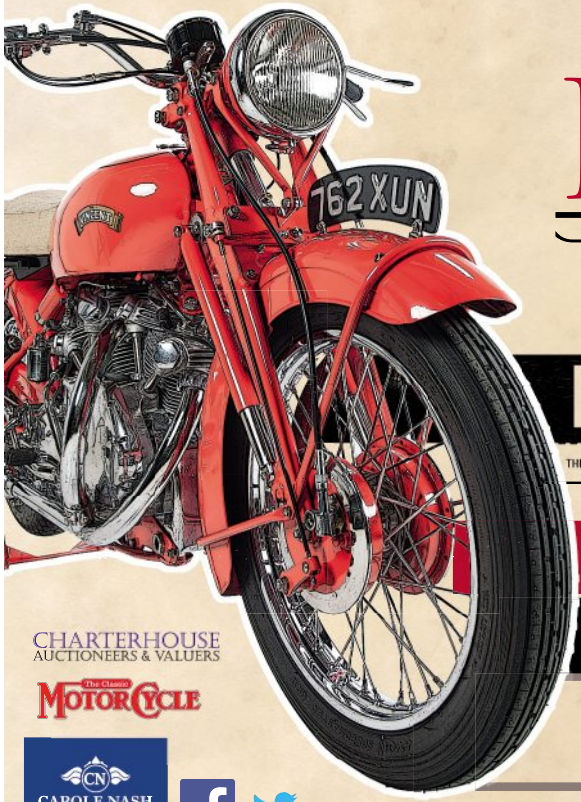

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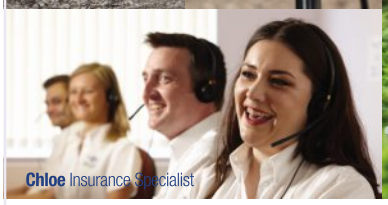

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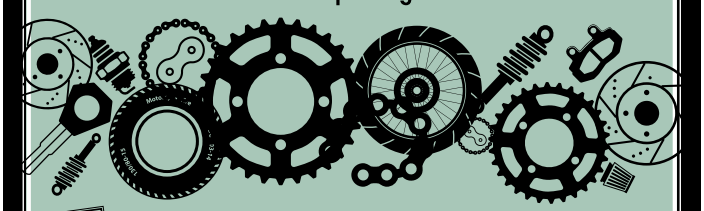

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WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Classic gloss black paintwork, gold frame and wheels showcase an enduringly popular engine in a radical guise

1: Brake hose is routed discreetly down through the yoke keeping the front end clutter-free

2: The driveshaft has been kept as straight as possible by canting the engine up to reduce stress on the UV joint

3: A neat pair of K&Ns replace the massive original air box: love the gloss black cylinder heads. Tidy choke levers, fabricated from steel rod and ball bearings, eliminate messy cables

IN 1973 BMW attempted to shake off the firm's boring image by launching the R90S. Using the well proven R75/5 as a basis, the engine was bored out from 749 to 898cc and an extra gear added, giving a five-speed box. Hans Muth introduced bold new styling with a unique air-brushed finish on each machine, and the BMW sports tourer was born. Long- distance, high-speed riding in comfort became a reality. The R90S was ultra-reliable, economical and handled well; 17,465 were built between 1973 and 1976, and today they have lost none of their appeal, commanding prices in excess of £8000.

Our featured machine is probably as far from a standard R90S as it's possible to get. Using the reliable powerplant, it takes things to a whole new level. Although subtle and understated, it simply demands a second glance. The longer you look at it, the more you observe, and start to appreciate the amount of thought and effort which has been lavished on it in creating such a unique machine.

It was built initially by the Dutch BMW race bike specialists Becks Motoren Wijhe, and they remember this particular BMW as being a really quick bike. It was bought by a Dutch collector and subsequently raced in Europe and at Le Mans, finishing in the top 10 in its class. It was eventually acquired as part of a job lot by a dealer in the south of England where it stood for a while until spotted by Duncan, its current owner.

Lots of bits were missing or simply didn't work. It took Duncan three attempts to create a rear subframe which enabled the rider's knees to fit in behind the fairing. Eventually the subframe was moved back about eight inches; it seems that the R90 was initially designed and built for a much shorter rider. Duncan also fabricated the unique seat and tailpiece.

Standard BMW parts were used where possible, although well-informed observers will spot the subtle Italian influence at work. This machine is a great marriage of Ducati and BMW components – in those days Ducati and Cagiva were all one company, so the Ducati 851 screen is badged with the Cagiva elephant.

Back with BMW. An R90S frame forms the basis of the bike with a K100 petrol tank, K1100

wheels, K1100 forks and brakes. The donor 898cc engine has been heavily tuned for racing and sports a unique camshaft. Other one-off components include the two-into-one exhaust with a very neat collector box.

When raced the bike was fitted with the rare Krauser four-valve heads for increased power. These went missing at some point in the distant past so were replaced with standard two-valve heads which were gas flowed and fitted with oversize valves. Duncan opted for Carrillo conrods and Mahle pistons. The Dell'Orto carburettors were also missing and so were replaced with 40mm Bings. To avoid messy choke cables, Duncan fabricated a neat pair of choke levers from ball bearings and steel rod. He also took the opportunity to fit a new clutch and to tidy up the wiring, replacing most of it.

To allow for left-hand race circuits the engine has been offset as far as the frame allows. There is no clearance at all between the engine and frame on the right-hand side but enough on the left to get your hand in between them. The left-side exhaust fits inside the frame, while the right exhaust is outside the frame.

Being built for endurance racing, the drive shaft is kept as straight as possible to avoid stress and wear on the UV joint, and this was achieved by canting the engine up. Doing away with the massive standard airbox leaves a lot of space behind the engine, giving a clearer view of the beautifully hand-crafted exhaust system and collector box. Originally this was black but Duncan had it chromed to highlight the craftsmanship involved.

Harrisons of Peebles painted the frame and wheels their striking gold, which perfectly complements the luscious black paintwork courtesy of Airbrush Antics in Edinburgh.

The instrument panel is standard BMW; a set of clocks reading in miles rather than kilometres per hour was eagerly purchased… however, it was soon discovered that they understated performance ever so slightly, reading a pedestrian 30mph when the bike was doing 80-plus! On the speedo face in small letters is the ratio preceded by 'W='. This ratio corresponds to the differential; this diff was only fitted to the R100S or CS. It is very highly geared and the ratio had to be matched to the drive to finally achieve an accurate speedo reading.

PRICE GUIDE

£6000 to £14,000
(standard R90S)

FAULTS & FOIBLES

For a standard R90S: some components (including saddle, handlebar risers) not shared with /6. Original white-number/red needle instruments very hard to find. Mechanical tacho can be noisy; needles fall off. ATE brakes need properly setting up. Electrical gremlins can be diode failure on the board in the headlight. Hot starting probs can be due to heat transfer where carbs mount directly onto metal

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1: The engine has been moved as far as possible to the right giving better left-hand clearance, with one exhaust inside and one outside the frame

2: Engine is seriously offset, you can get your hand through the gap between engine and frame

3: Trick single-sided swinging arm and wheel from a later K1100RS highlight the beautifully crafted exhaust

4: Something radical for the summer, sir?

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BMW – Freude am Fahren

Keeping everything neat and tidy, the brake pipe has been threaded down through the steering stem. This bike also sports a nice set of multi-adjustable clip-ons. Although the bars are below the yokes they are not right down low, so the riding position isn't as radical as it first appears. Being a lot lighter than a standard road bike, the BMW handles beautifully. The significantly offset engine doesn't affect handling according to its owner, and gives a lot of clearance on left-handers.

Moving the engine to the right enabled a single-sided swinging arm to be fitted, replacing the standard bike's twin shocks. The single-sided swinging arm donated by a K1100RS was really trick for its time and frequently misleads casual observers about the vintage of the bike's engine. The R90 still has its original gearbox and relies solely and confidently on the electric start rather than the kickstart.

Duncan has ridden this bike extensively and reports a massive grin each time he takes it out. Although it was built for endurance rather than speed, it is an extremely swift machine and he estimates a top speed in excess of 130mph. It's light, responsive and handles, just as you'd expect from a well put together BMW. The Brembos are far superior to the original R90S brakes, taking care of braking efficiently with no drama, so the rider can concentrate on really enjoying it – especially on those left hand bends... CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1974 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv horizontally-opposed twin **BORE / STROKE:** 90mm x 70.6mm **CAPACITY:** 898cc **POWER:** c80bhp **CARBS:** 2x 40mm Bing **LUBRICATION:** Twin oil pumps due to engine angle, wet sump **CLUTCH:** Lightweight flywheel for racing, dry clutch **FINAL DRIVE:** Shaft GEARS: 5-speed **IGNITION:** Electronic **LIGHTING:** Ducati 851 headlight and fairing **FRAME:** R90S modified for single-sided swinging arm **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Tele forks, K1100 **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin Öhlins shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** 2x Brembo discs **REAR BRAKE:** Single K1100 disc **FRONT TYRE:** K1100RS 120 x 17 **REAR TYRE:** K1100RS 140 x 17 **SEAT HEIGHT:** 810mm **TOP SPEED:** 130mph-plus

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PHOTOS BY JOE DICK

IN THE PAST 40 years, Jack has always owned at least one Gold Wing. He started out with a GL1000 in 1977 and, as you might imagine, he's owned quite a few since then alongside many other types of motorcycle. But there's something about the original Wing which keeps him coming back for more – and that says something significant about Honda's achievement. Aimed squarely at America, the GL1000 was so successful that Honda sold more than 25,000 original Wings each year in the USA and ended up building the things Stateside. The Gold Wing is a lot like the Range Rover: it's almost a marque in its own right.

After stealing the scene with the CB750 in the late 1960s, Honda then had to share the spotlight with the superbikes of the early Seventies. The CB struggled to keep up with Kawasaki's Z1 and couldn't match the long-distance capability of BMW's touring twins. So in 1975 Honda introduced a revolutionary motorcycle: pressurised water-cooling, a decade ahead of its time, equipped with an unobtrusive shaft drive that set the standard for all touring motorcycles that followed – a giant leap forward. And, by the standards of the era, simply gigantic.

Above: Honda amazed the world with its first four, the CB750. Then they did it again with the Gold Wing

1: Don't go looking in here for the petrol; it's stored under the seat. The dummy fuel tank contains instead… the kickstart lever. Only on a Gold Wing, eh?

2: When you think about it, the flat-four is a considerably logical way to lay out a bike engine. Carbs on top, exhausts below. Makes you wonder why all engines aren't like this?

3: The brakes are the least impressive part of the machine, but those were different days. Stainless rotors and feeble calipers demand much effort from the rider – and care in the rain

4: These days, decent exhausts aren't easy to find, and owners are advised to fit modern suspension units to provide a more controlled ride. Alloy rims save weight. Of course they do…

The Wing's oversquare flat-four engine configuration was tuned to give Gran Turismo-type torque. Its modest power output of 80bhp at 7000rpm was sufficient to propel the massive machine to just over 120mph, but the 85Nm of torque at 5500rpm was what really mattered to the rider. Each pair of water-cooled cylinders had a single overhead cam driven by a toothed belt; torque reaction from the transverse engine arrangement was minimised, with the alternator rotor turning in the opposite direction to the crank. The resulting supremely smooth power delivery offers effortless acceleration even today and its quiet efficiency significantly reduces rider fatigue.

If the engine was astonishing, the chassis was entirely conventional – just beefed up across the board. Although the twin downtube frame, tele forks and twin shocks felt familiar, the Wing was the first Japanese bike to be braked by triple discs. It definitely needed them: they were never especially effective in the wet, and demanded plenty of lever pressure when the big bike was fully laden.

Although the Wing seemed huge and heavy compared to most 1970s 750s, it was actually

1

2

3

4

slimmer and lower than BMW's touring 900cc twin. The Wing's low centre of mass made it surprisingly manoeuvrable on the move. Honda neatly positioned the gearbox under the crankshaft and the petrol tank under the seat, making the motorcycle surprisingly responsive to rider input and rewarding to ride, even on British B-roads which couldn't be considered its obvious environment. With a solo rider the Wing's performance is far from stodgy, delivering a sub-13 second quarter mile.

However, it could be provoked into a disconcerting high-speed weave and owners soon found it productive to experiment with tyre profiles and pressures, as well as uprated suspension units. Fully fuelled, with pilot and passenger and luggage for a week away, a Gold Wing's weight can easily exceed 1100lb (add even more for a trendy Windjammer fairing), and all that mass has inevitable consequences for both handling and braking.

Hence Honda gave the GL1000 a major makeover in 1978, fitting smaller carbs, revised ignition and softer valve timing to improve the engine's low-end performance. It mattered little that the Wing lost a couple of mph at the top end, because outright speed wasn't its forte. The six-cylinder CBX had become Honda's flagship sportster, so it made sense to improve the Wing's low-rev rideability. In keeping with its transformation into an outright tourer, the GL1000 also got Comstar wheels, a more comfortable stepped saddle, slightly better brakes and revised suspension. But these were only stop-gap measures until the GL1100 arrived in 1980.

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Four-gallon fuel capacity gives fewer than 150 miles between fills. Check that the starter motor is functioning fine (avoid examples with 'a flat battery'). Rear tyre wear is significant especially if you have a heavy throttle hand. Clutch doesn't take kindly to sustained slipping

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SUZUKI GS1000: similar prices, less technically interesting than the Wing, no shaft drive. Yamaha XS1100: 20% more power and stonking acceleration, shaft drive, lower prices. Kawasaki Z1000ST: shaft-drive semi-tourer, relatively rare

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Tucked away on the Isle of Wight, Vincent's Motorcycles & Antiques have this 1978 edition GL1000 up for sale at £2995. It's done 40,000 miles and is in 'superb original condition'

For some enthusiasts, the first Wings are also the most desirable. Jack's bike attracted a crowd at the CBG Winter Classic last year – it's a KO-series, first edition 1975 machine, built in Japan before production moved to the USA. Jack's owned it for a few years, gradually bringing it back to standard spec and as-new condition. "I still have a few small jobs to complete," he says, "but when I bought the bike it was running very roughly, mainly due to carburation problems – these early Wings are notorious for this. It had been stood for a long time, so the carbs were stripped and rebuilt with a kit from Randaaks in USA, then balanced properly. The bike now runs superbly.

Above: Although these truly are great machines, there's a lot to go wrong, so buy with care – or get a decent warranty

MANUFACTURED: 1975 to 1979 **ENGINE:** Water-cooled horizontally opposed flat four **BORE / STROKE:** 72mm x 61.4mm **CAPACITY:** 999cc **COMPRESSION:** 9:1 **POWER:** 80bhp @ 7500rpm **TORQUE:** 85NM @ 5500rpm **CLUTCH:** Wet, multi-plate **CARBS:** 4x 32mm CV Mikuni (or Keihin) **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Hy-Vo chain **FINAL DRIVE:** Shaft **IGNITION:** 12V twin coil **FRAME:** Duplex tube, pressed-steel gussets, removable lower rail for engine access **FRONT BRAKE:** 2x 11-inch discs **REAR BRAKE:** 11.5-inch disc **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Tele forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shocks, 5-way preload adjustment **WHEELBASE:** 60.5 inches **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31.5 inches **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6 inches DRY **WEIGHT:** 575lb **ACCELERATION:** 0 to 60mph in 4 seconds **BRAKING:** 29ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 125mph

"I like to see these bikes in standard trim, so the only upgrade I recommend is to fit some better, aftermarket rear shocks. The saddle is extremely uncomfortable – a lot of riders used to fit king/queen aftermarket seats which were much better for riding long distances, but to my mind they ruin the looks of the bike. So on mine I replaced the non-standard seat, and had all paintwork redone in the original Candy Antares Red paint. I polished the carb tops, cambelt and rockerbox covers as these were very rough after being left for so long.

"The Wing's weakest point is the standard exhaust which simply rots away, and it's very difficult to find good standard replacements. Similarly, there's a removable frame section on the lower left side which is also well known for rotting away – worth checking before you buy. If you can find a machine with good chrome mudguards, a good standard seat and decent original wheels then you'll save yourself a lot of time and money. All these parts are hard to find – and expensive when you do.

"This Wing hasn't suffered any mechanical failures while I've owned it, and I see no reason to suspect any problems in the near future. Perhaps its best feature is that silky smooth engine. It runs as well today as it did in 1975." CBG

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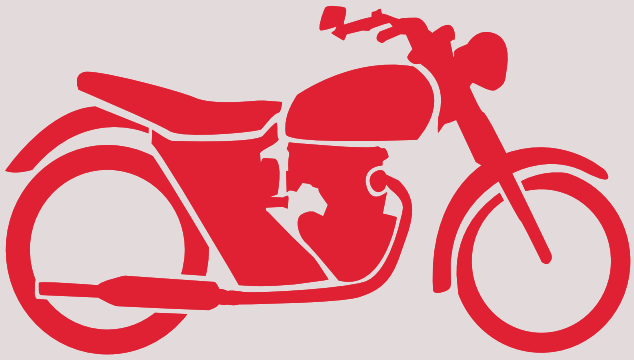

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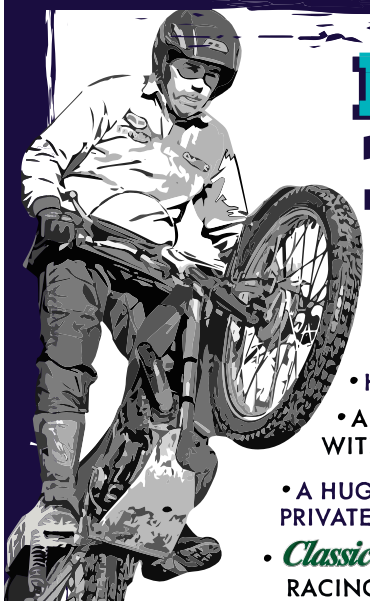

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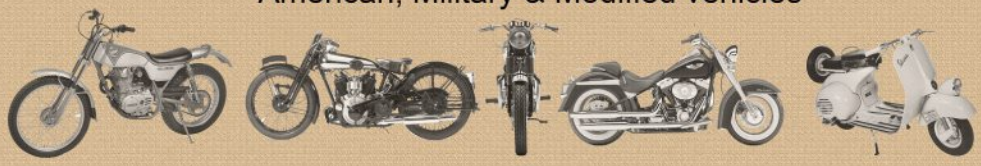

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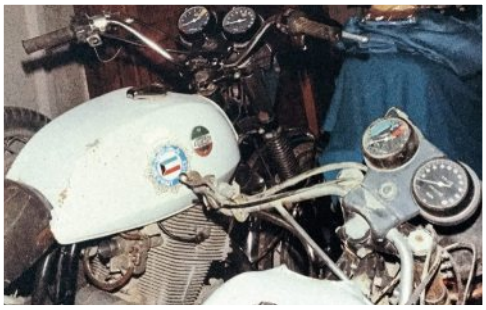

I ENJOYED THE article on the history and development of the Laverda 750 twins, as I remember when I owned both a GTL and SF3. My friend had found out that a large number of ex-police bikes were being sold in Kuwait in the Middle East. He intended to bid for a multiple number, and was I interested? I asked what the bikes were – he was a bit vague but believed they were Triumphs and Nortons.

I agreed to buy one of each of the two types of bike, but thought it would come to nothing. Some weeks later my friend contacted me to say that he'd been successful in buying 50 or more Laverdas but had lost out with the bids for the Triumph and Norton bikes. Was I still interested? I was amazed at the number and said that I was.

His company owned a warehouse in Liverpool docks. When I went to see the bikes being off-loaded from a container, we were dismayed to see that they had been stacked on top of each other with no protection. They had transit damage which had occurred to anything that projected beyond the bikes, so the indicators and instruments on some were broken. Also, as the bikes had stood in an open compound in Kuwait for some time, each was covered in a grey, fine sandy dust.

I was allowed to select two of the better bikes, one a GTL and the other an SF3. My friend kept a few of the bikes but sold the others off, both as complete bikes and as spares. This took place in the early 1980s and, due to moving house and so on, I didn't start to look at the bikes until the late 1990s. I started with the GTL as this was in the better condition, and as I disassembled it I realised how good a condition it was in.

I didn't take the engine apart but did rebuild the carburettors, change the oil, had the tank and side panels repainted. I had some parts rechromed and the chainguard painted. The original single seat was in poor condition and was fixed using two spade projections from the frame. I found a second-hand Honda 250 dual seat which looked similar to the Laverda seat and, when modified, did the job. The GTL's date of manufacture was confirmed (maybe by Slaters?), it was checked for roadworthiness and an age-related number was allocated. I displayed the GTL at Stafford but apart from a few short rides didn't use it at all. It was sold in 2002 to fund my daughter's wedding.

The SF3 had been modified to suit its police duties with a single seat, alternator and drum brakes. While the GTL had steel wheel rims, the SF had aluminium ones. My friend supplied the spares to replace the rev counter and steel side panels, but I never quite had enough time to start the project and sold it sometime later.

My overriding memory of the GTL was the quality of the bike, which used the best components available from Nippon Denso and Bosch. The overall weight was significant, especially when manhandling it in the garage, and the grip strength required to operate the clutch was phenomenal. Recently I found my old GTL online; the seat had been changed and the chainguard chrome-plated. But I would recognise it anywhere, with the replacement Moto Guzzi black indicators and extra holes drilled on the headlamp bracket to take the siren.
Kevin Davies

British bikes were frequently supplied to far-flung lands as part of aid packages (as have been many Land Rovers). Many came back during the 1980s and early 1990s, including containers of ex-Saudi T160 Tridents and TR7RV Triumphs from Nigeria. They looked awful, but were in fact low mileage and in excellent mechanical condition. ***CBG***

VELO FELLOWS

THE VELOCETTE OWNERS' CLUB held an 'experts' forum' in Alcester last year. 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

BIKE SHOWS @ BRUM

I READ WITH INTEREST Graham Homer's letter regarding his experiences at the NEC Classic Car and Bike Show in 2016. I share his views on the very high parking charges, always a feature of NEC visits. I used to park in the station car park as a visitor but they have twigged this and upped the charges!

However, as the organiser of the VMCC stand at the show, I would like to point out our experiences from exhibiting in 2016 for the fourth year. We do not pay for our stand and have never been asked to. It is carpeted at no cost to ourselves. We are allocated 60 square metres of display area which allows us to display up to 10 motorcycles with ample space to look at them in detail, photograph them and permits wheelchair access with no barriers and chain link or other obstructive fencing to discourage visitors from getting close to enjoy the exhibits to the full. Our member Alan Bullock's BMW R50 was featured in your report in the same issue as Graham's letter.

This event is of course primarily a car show with motorcycles included, which we accept. Other clubs, I understand, turned down the opportunity to exhibit in 2016 because they felt the show did not reach their core audience. I agree with them, but we are seeking a new audience, we do not need to preach to the already converted. The organisers accept that the show is an opportunity to present the classic motorcycle movement to a potentially new audience and hopefully kindle some interest and develop new followers.

With an ageing and declining VMCC membership, we at the Midlands section grasp every chance to broaden our audience and recruit new and younger members from wherever. Our display of machines reflected this wish, the 1977 Honda CD200 being the most viewed and discussed machine by visitors to the stand. The Honda's owner actively encouraged visitors to sit on it and feel it for real!

If we are asked, we will be thrilled to return in 2017.

Roy Osborn, Midlands VMCC

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LIFE

***CBG* HAS BEEN** my chosen motorcycle read almost from its first issue. It always holds my interest and I like your way of keeping it fresh by slipping in articles about modern retro bikes and readers' specials and customs. Like many of my fellow readers, age and its problems have curtailed my riding of large, heavy bikes. I am not alone. I bet many of you have gone to the assistance of an older rider who is struggling with his machine while on a club run. I still ride a B31 combo, but this is impractical for general use. 125cc machines are great fun but you are a bit vulnerable on dual carriageways or motorways.

My local MoT tester heard my story, and told me of the 250cc machine built by Herald, at Huntingdon not far away from my home. So we paid them a visit. The works was very impressive; spotless, tidy and well organised. An added bonus was that the workforce was all motorcyclists. The missus spent time talking to a lady assembler at the bench, then walked back to me and ordered me to buy one. What a result!

There are several choices to choose from, all built around a Suzuki GN250-based engine. Yes, they are manufactured in the East but they are assembled and finished in England, creating good skills and jobs for several people. The design is good and simple, no plastic to wade through and anybody with a basic toolkit can work on it. My Herald Classic 250 is terrific value for money and, with a 60-70mph cruising speed, it keeps me grinning all day!

Peter Johnson

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

JAPANESE CLASSICS

NOT A BAD EFFORT on Japanese bikes… except you have missed about four-fifths of them. Including the Honda Cub! This is the second most important vehicle in personal transport history, behind the Model T Ford. Also lots of small but innovative and interesting bikes like the Honda H100 (my current regular ride), Yamaha YL1, the Honda 175, 185 and 200 Benlys, perfect for classic bike events. To your credit you included the CG125. These motorcycles have carried millions of people millions of miles without being 'thundering' like most modern bikes. We're not all 7' 9" and 36 stone.

Classics on the motorway? Providing you can maintain 55mph it's no problem, just use the inside lane. My camper van is happy at this speed. Many HGVs have a 100kph (56mph) limit so for a few exits it's okay.

Chris Harper

IN THE DECEMBER issue it says "if your favourite model isn't mentioned…" I've got a 1990 Honda CM125C. Present mileage is approx 8500km. It is a beauty.

You didn't mention it so I request a picture in a future issue.

Chris Walker

Thanks for the suggestions, chaps. As we may have mentioned on more than one occasion, there simply isn't room to fit in every single model ever made, be it Japanese, European or British (and any second now the American iron riders are going to realise they've been seriously short-changed…). So thanks for sharing your favourite Japanese classics. As promised, here they are for all to admire. ***CBG***

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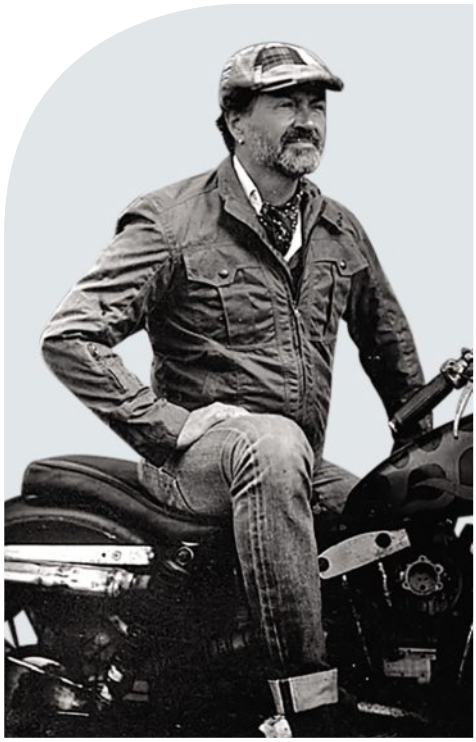

PAUL D'ORLÉANS

To ball or not to ball?

The eligibility rules for the 2018 Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Rally are here

AS FRANK SINATRA sang, "Start spreadin' the news", but by the time you read this it will likely be too late. The announcement of the eligibility rules for the 2018 Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Rally hit my inbox, and now there are 21 months to decide if or how I'll participate. Even pondering that question is a luxury, as the invitation means I've already participated in the Cannonball – "If you've been, you're in". I've also, as a self-employed writer, had the flexibility to clear the decks for three weeks to ride a really old motorcycle across the USA. I've joined that rolling circus three times now; twice as a rider, and once as a photographer, and each experience was wildly different, and equally exhausting. Then again, when was anything truly epic less than exhausting?

My mantra for the 2016 ride was 'This is my last Cannonball', but now I'm not so sure. Three cross-country journeys seemed a nice round number, a sign of completion. Plus, we'd shot around 350 tintypes during those trips, using my Sprinter van as a mobile darkroom; my photo partner Suzie Heartbreak is currently assembling a book of those images. I doubt we'll produce a 'Cannonball2' book of wet plate/collodion photography. And, I have nothing further to prove from such a ride. Except perhaps that I can coax a 1928 overhead-camshaft Velocette 3750 miles from Portland Maine to Portland Oregon...

In case you don't recall, I attempted the 2012 Cannonball on 'The Mule', my 1933 Mk4 KTT motor in a 1928 KSS rolling chassis. The Mule has been in this configuration since 1933, as Veloce Ltd delivered a loose KTT motor to Mack's Motorcycles of Everett, Massachusetts. The racing engine was installed in a spare KSS chassis and raced on east coast dirt tracks. The rider's name was Haner (his son Rick lives two hours from me), and 'Mack' was C A McConney, a gruff fellow with a dry sense of humour, whose shop is still in business near Boston as GP Motorcycle Supply. The Mule ate a new/replacement camshaft after 1000 miles on the Cannonball, and is still sitting in my garage without its cambox. I haven't repaired it in the subsequent four years. That speaks more about my sparse spare time than my interest in reviving the beast; I miss that little hot mess!

But would I try another cross-country run on her? Well, I'd have to rebuild and ride her for at least 500 trouble-free miles. I won't run the Cannonball without a mechanic to help (as I'll still be making photographs) and I'd need a lot of spares for the journey. All that adds up; two hotel rooms for 17 days of Cannonball ride plus two days before the ride, 17 days' pay for the mechanic, organising someone to drive my Sprinter from San Francisco to Maine and those fuel/hotel costs, plus the entry fee (was $2500, now?), and suddenly we're pushing $20k for an arduous yet rewarding cross-country ride on back roads, taking a new route I've only ridden the last 1/3rd of (as I've ridden every decent strip of blacktop west of the Rockies). Worth it?

The biggest problem with that scenario is Suzie Heartbreak. There's no pillion on a KTT, it's just too small for a loveseat. So, Option B is borrowing a bike, like we did for the 2014 Cannonball, when Bryan Bossier of Sinless Cycles in Louisiana loaned Revival Cycles and me a 1933 Brough Superior 1150. Yes, that's generous! I can say hand on heart that we returned the Brough in better condition than we got it, and she now has *pur sang* Cannonball provenance; it made every mile, and cruised at 70mph all day long even two-up. Alan, Suzie, and I grew to love that machine, and immediately offered Bryan cash for her, which he refused. So began my search for a first year 1150, which was built in various iterations from 1933-39, always using a JAP 1100cc 60deg V-twin JTZ sidevalve motor. The 1150 was always faster than an SS80, with JAP or Matchless motor, and was George Brough's secret favourite in the 1930s, after JAP's OHV SS100 motor proved troublesome, and the Matchless-engined SS100 proved too docile. Anyway, we'd need to borrow a pre-1929 SS80 Brough for the Cannonball, which would not be a hardship.

For 2018, the Cannonball will become two competitions; one for Centurions – motorcycles built 1918 and earlier, and one for nonagenarians – bikes before 1929. That means two sets of trophies, two sets of time/mileage rules, and two very different rally experiences for the riders. While the 1918 cut-off allows scope for 3-speed gearboxes with clutches, they're still fragile and slow compared to, say, a late 1920s SS80, or a KTT, both of which could run circles around a 1918 anything. Then again, I could find a 1918 bike, and do it the hard way. What would you do? CBG

'Then again, when was anything truly epic less than exhausting?'

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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MARK WILLIAMS

Steady as he goes

A salute to Stormin' Norman Hossack, and his never changing steering geometry

ALTHOUGH THE CAR industry has often developed innovative suspension techniques for the products that end up in their dealers' showrooms – think of Citroën's hydropneumatic or British Leyland's hydrolastic systems – the same can hardly be said of bike manufacturers.

Girder forks gave way to telescopic ones in the 1940s, which were refined a bit with the advent of alloy sliders in the 1960s, and a vogue for 'Earles-type' forks featuring a brace of shock absorbers suspending a sort of front-facing swinging arm was employed by BMW, Greeves and others, albeit adding chassis weight. However, upside-down forks did, to an extent, compensate for the inherent floppiness of telescopic forks when they emerged in the 1990s, but they also piled on the pounds.

And at the rear end, twin shocks followed by mono shocks on a pivoting 'fork' have been the norm for decades, but these set-ups have a number of inherent drawbacks, the most obvious being that as the suspensions compress and expand, the chassis geometry, and thus the vehicle's handling characteristics, change.

As riders we tend to compensate for these changes with subconscious acuity, but over time a number of specialist designers have addressed the issue with weird-looking suspensions that drew accusations of eccentricity, which, in turn, mitigated against their mass production. For example, the hub-centre steered designs of Jack DeFazio, Tony Foale and Bimota, and the Saxon/MoTodd contraption that ultimately appeared as the BMW's Telelever front fork. The latter essentially involved a front swinging arm that had the effect of increasing the rake and trail during braking, instead of doing the opposite. But even if they worked, almost all these appurtenances added weight and complexity – further undermining their commercial appeal.

Step forward then Scottish-born Norman Hossack, a fascinating character who, as a clubman racer of some merit growing up in Rhodesia, was hired by the McLaren motor racing team in the early 1970s as a chassis builder and mechanic – after turning down a similar role with Barry Sheene! During his time at McLaren, Hossack built a radical and highly efficient two-stroke engine using what was essentially a square piston, but sadly space doesn't permit further discussion of that here. More pertinently though, he observed that under hard braking the steered front ends of racing cars juddered significantly, diminishing driver control and braking efficiency. His solution was to stiffen the bulkheads that held the suspension units. As a motorcyclist, Hossack set about solving the same problems inherent in motorcycle suspensions by applying the common racing car practice of two wishbones held on a common upright, abetted by a steering linkage.

In Hossack's cunning design the axle rotates through 90° and is over-hung, the consequences being that the steering head and trail angles could remain constant, as would the wheelbase – something those of us long used to plunging front ends under hard braking might well find unsettling – at least initially. Moreover, a single shock absorber can be placed behind or in front of the steering head and the manipulating of these components permits levels of anti-dive to suit different demands.

Hossack's design also had significant weight saving benefits at the front end and indeed overall, his trellis-framed 1979 Honda XL500-engined prototype weighed some 60lbs less than the stock production bike! However, despite these advantages the financial strain of maintaining his patents obliged Hossack to abandon further development, which allowed BMW to pretty much resurrect it as its Duolever in 2004. Despite a smattering of interest in the motorcycle press (including from yours truly) in the early Eighties, Hossack sold his by then highly competitive racer to Vernon Glashier, who promptly won the 1983 Bemsee Single Cylinder Championship on it. Glashier subsequently accomplished the same in the 1986, '87 and '88 250cc series aboard a version of the bike powered by a Rotax two-stroke.

Meanwhile, the designs deployed by Jack DeFazio, the engineers at ELF petroleum for their 'frameless' racer and Yamaha with their FZ750-based RADD MC2 (and later their GTS1000) used differing hub-centre designs – which, by the way, first appeared in the 1923 Ner-a-Car – that were all ultimately flawed, not least due to added frontal weight.

Using Ducati, Laverda and Suzuki motors, Hossack continued to build bespoke racing frames featuring his suspension and in 1994 F1 entrepreneur Keith Duckworth commissioned Hossack to design a Triumph 900 Trident chassis, which worked especially well, but it never went further than a single prototype. Perhaps by then disenchanted, Hossack applied his inventive genius to packaging machines and medical equipment, eventually moving to California where his affection for Ducatis – a Bolognese 250cc single was his first-ever race bike – led him to build one of his suspensions for his daily driver, a Ducati 800 Sport. Mated to the company's signature trellis frame, it looks as good as it performs, and with a total weight saving of some 15lbs.

On this side of the Atlantic, designer Claude Fior is credited with penning a very Hossack-like double wishbone front suspension for the reborn Brough-Superiors now being built in France for a stinking rich clientele, and Spanish custom house El Soliatrio produced a TM-engined street-tracker for last year's DirtQuake festival sporting a very Hossack-ish front end. Now we have sneak pics of Honda's next generation Goldwing with front suspension that looks suspiciously similar to Hossack's. So nearly five decades after its debut, does this mean Norman Hossack's innovative thinking will finally find its way onto a production line? We can only wait and see. CBG

'In Hossack's cunning design the axle rotates through 90° and is over-hung, the consequences being that the steering head and trail angles could remain constant, as would the wheelbase…'

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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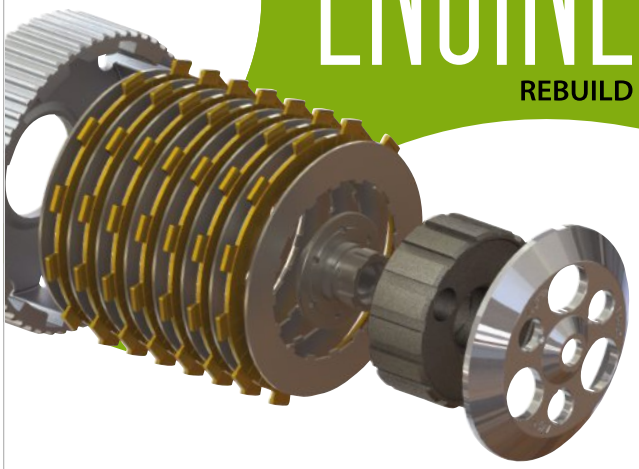

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Can we be trusted with MoT decisions?

YOU MIGHT RECALL all the brouhaha when the Government announced the relaxation in rules regarding MoT testing for classic vehicles. In essence, classic vehicles constructed before 1960 need no longer trouble the MoT bay; unless the owner chose to of their own volition. The reasoning was that owners of older machines tend to be enthusiasts who cherish their rides and wouldn't risk themselves or, more importantly, their rare and valuable classics on the road unless they were in tip-top condition.

At the time I remember reading online forum posts where owners were outraged at the removal of this compulsory annual examination. They electronically shouted of the impending chaos as thousands of old clunkers would now take to the road, unhindered by speed-robbing red tape, death traps causing carnage and mayhem wherever they leaked. Indeed, most then went on to profess their undying love for the overworked MoT tester and declared that thirty quid was a small price to pay for the peace of mind an annual inspection by a third party would provide.

Since the law changed, the number of people I actually know who have bothered to submit their bikes to a voluntary MoT test is… none. I asked my local MoT garage and indeed the next one further along. Zero was the answer in both cases. Neither have I seen a lurid red top headline along the lines of 'Old duffer on Spagforth Whippet crashes into local WI shop window', so I must conclude the Government's move was a good one.

They've now decided to consult on whether it should be taken further and have invited people to comment on a number of proposed changes. These include removing the exemption altogether. Another is a compulsory basic test for ALL historic vehicles every two years, with historic status being bestowed after as little as 30 years. More stringent enforcement of the rules surrounding custom, or substantially altered vehicles, is also proposed. But the most likely outcome is a rolling 40 year exemption for both MoT testing and VED, being both simple to administer and affecting relatively few vehicles. Or does it?

If we take the less generous definition of historic status, 40 years, as an example, the actual number runs into the hundreds of thousands, of which only a tiny proportion will be Brough Superiors and Chitty Chitty Bang Bangs. The vast majority will be Seventies mass-produced cars and bikes. For sure, an Ariel Red Hunter is a cherished classic, but a Hillman Hunter? A 1976 Kawasaki 900 will touch 130mph; do we really want those running around on ancient, cracked tyres with worn wheel bearings and binding brakes? You might declare the Special K's finest as an exception – and be right – but instead let's consider a decidedly non-classic 400N Superdream in all its three hundred quid glory. I can pretty much guarantee that's not roadworthy, yet will be exempt from testing, basking in its protected historic status.

Even with the current legislation, I know several people who would knowingly ride their pre-1960 bike with a known fault, safe in the knowledge that it will never be picked up on: "Oh yes, the lights are a bit dodgy but I never ride after dark" or "The horn's packed up but I'm not paying £200 to have it restored". Slightly leaky fork seal? Who's to know? Imagine the chaos if we extrapolate that out from 1960 to a 40 year cut-off. Instead of a 27bhp single we're now looking at 70bhp fours – and that's just the bikes. You are also free to chalk up as many miles as you wish on your untested bike, there are no restrictions.

It seems to me that the vast majority of classic vehicles live cosseted lives and cover relatively few miles a year on public roads, with high mileage riders being the exception. To that end, I would suggest that the rolling 40 year rule applies with the following two choices:

No MoT test but mileage limited to 1000 miles per annum

Compulsory biannual MoT with unlimited mileage

I encounter very few classics that cover anything like a thousand miles a year, but if you want to ride around the world on an old bike, then it needs to be thoroughly examined at the MoT station and you'll have to pay a little more for the privilege. All substantially altered machines should also be carefully examined on a two-yearly basis. There are too many 'MoT exempt' horror examples of a huge Jap four engine shoehorned into a battered old Featherbed frame out there already. Even worse, the shed-built bobber or brat bike that's an accident waiting to happen.

I'm all about freedom of choice, but frankly, we can't be trusted. CBG

'Since the law changed, the number of people I actually know who have bothered to submit their bikes to a voluntary MoT test is… none'

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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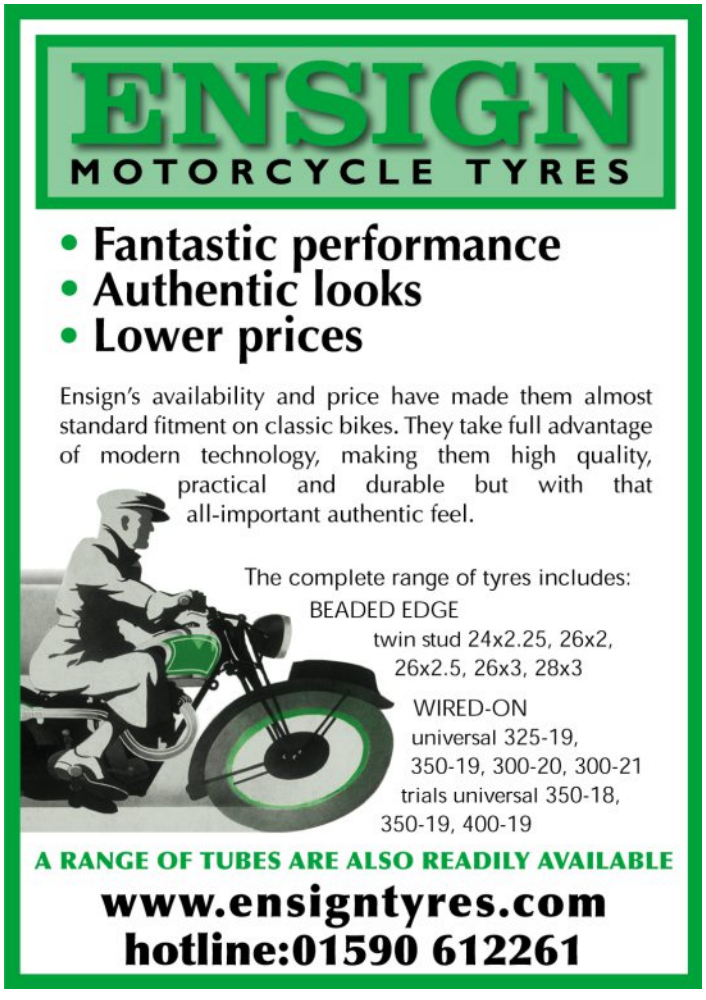


GOLD Rush

Updating an icon can be a risky business. It's all too easy to throw the baby out with the bathwater, or produce a pastiche instead of an improvement. But if you want the best, you may have to build it yourself…

WORDS BY ROWENA HOSEASON
PHOTOS BY CHRIS DICKINSON

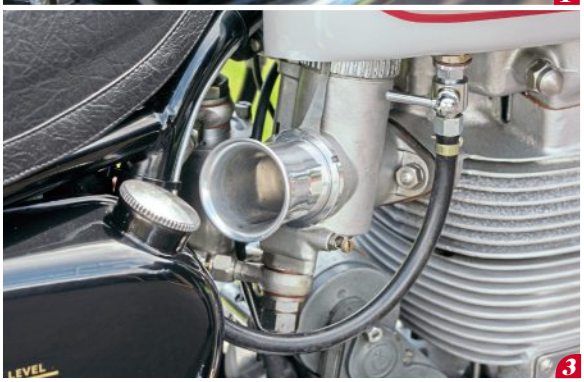
When BSA first built this bike, they did a damn fine job of it. The Gold Star is arguably one of the best British motorcycles ever made, and the DBD editions of the late 1950s represent the model at the peak of its development pathway. But that was 60 years ago. Times have changed and technology has been transformed since this DB32 was originally assembled from hand-picked components, then rigorously bench-tested before delivery. Many of the Goldie's uncompromising attributes, those which gave it such a successful career as a clubmans racer, sit uncomfortably with its current role as a Sunday-best classic ride.

Famously, the GP carb and close-ratio RRT2 gearbox make starting a Gold Star into one of British biking's black arts. Combined with valve timing which only starts to feed in the power when the revs hit 3500rpm, and an easily overwhelmed clutch, they frustrate any form of clean getaway on stop/go suburban streets. Meanwhile, the much-vaunted 190mm front brake, so effective on track when running at the correct temperature and used consistently to decelerate at fixed braking markers, can be equally all-or-nothing on today's highways. Minimal use during a back road bimble barely rouses the full-width stopper from its slumber. So when the car in front suddenly executes an ABS-assisted emergency stop, the BSA's big brake is cold and unresponsive – until the moment when it bites, big time…

ABOVE:
Although it's not obvious to a casual glance, this Gold Star engine has been developed way beyond the final BSA version

BELOW:
Yeah, yeah. Just another over-polished, under-ridden Goldie. Except it's not. Read on…

None of which makes a clubmans Goldie in 1950s racing trim entirely ideal for classic rides on 21st century roads. But who says you have to stick to the original specification? Since BSA stopped building them in the early 1960s, legions of riders, racers and tuners have continued the Gold Star's technical development. Lessons learned in classic racing can be expertly adapted for a road-going Goldie. If you really, really want to ride a Gold Star – not just keep one in a trophy cabinet – then a little determination



1: A popular route to improved road manners with breathed-upon Goldies is to replace the stock RRT2 four-speed box with a five-speeder. Not in this case. This is still the four-speed box, although the gearing has been raised a little. Yes; you read that correctly

2: The raised gearing demands a competent clutch if the machine's going to work in any traffic at all. Phil Pearson made all the invisible internals, and they all work, thanks

3: The obligatory giant Amal mixes the gases and feeds them into the big bang device. Acquiring a tickover remains a black art, of course

4: Big GO demands big STOP, and although any purists who can survive the engine alterations may faint at the sight of the 2ls front brake, we can reveal that it works well

will go a long way. All it takes, in fact, is an enthusiastic owner and a superbly skilled specialist. Enter Chris Spaett and Phil Pearson, on a quest to build an interpretation of the ultimate Gold Star.

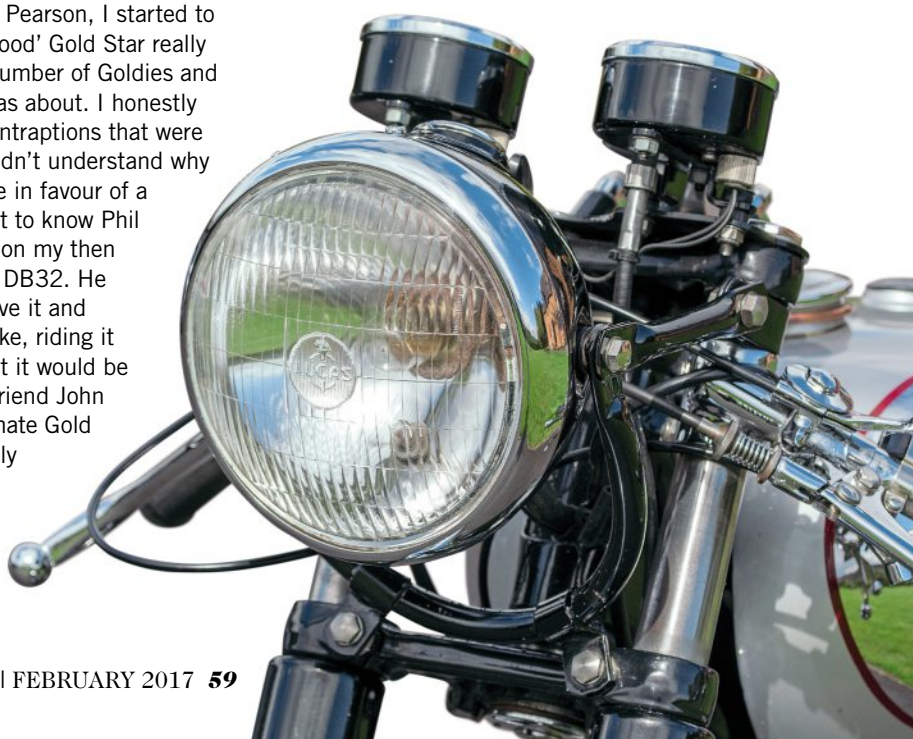
Chris and Phil had something of a head start when their project began. Lifelong motorcyclist Chris turned his hobby into a business many moons ago, and now buys and sells top-end classic bikes, frequently to contented repeat customers. Phil did something similar, but as a mechanical engineer he converted his 40-year pursuit of Gold Star perfection into a professional restoration service and technical workshop. Over the years, when Chris found a Gold Star which needed mechanical attention, Phil was the natural man to lay on the spanners. Chris bought and sold a fair few Goldies, and wasn't overly impressed by any of them, but slowly an idea started to take shape.

"Since getting to know Phil Pearson, I started to appreciate just how good a 'good' Gold Star really is," explains Chris. "I had a number of Goldies and wondered what all the fuss was about. I honestly felt that they were horrible contraptions that were unrideable on the road. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to buy one in favour of a Velocette Thruxton. Then I got to know Phil and he gave me some advice on my then current Gold Star, a standard DB32. He supplied some parts to improve it and suddenly I grew to love the bike, riding it most of the time. So I thought it would be quite fun to get him and his friend John Edwards to build me the ultimate Gold Star. Not so much cosmetically but a bike that is fabulous to ride, even on modern traffic congested roads."

Fabulous to ride: that sounds like a good starting point. There would be little sense in ripping apart an original or unrestored Goldie, one with matching numbers and pristine provenance. Instead they located a partially dismantled clubmans DB32 which Chris reckons was in "a pretty sorry state", missing some parts and fitted with an earlier 500cc CB34 engine. Someone else's incomplete project: perfect.

Chris had accumulated various BSA components over the years, some of which filled some of the gaps: "I supplied some of the bike's missing bits from my own stock, including a perfectly restored, original, English-made Gold Star tank."

Which just goes to show that it's always worth grabbing a bargain when you see it at an autojumble, even if you're not quite sure when it'll come in handy. Eventually, everything does.



1: To explore the full range of special Goldie parts and services which Phil Pearson provides, including his own electric start system, visit bsagoldstar.co.uk

2: A normally invisible extra which adds whole new layers of delight to Goldie piloting. Yes indeed, that is an electric leg, and it does work well

3: Sparks, lights? Yes, it has those

4: Obligatory Gold Star silencer shot. Add your own obligatory 'twitter' remark here

5 & 6: Classic clocks and classic fittings, just to keep things looking good

7: This may not be the ideal machine for those quiet country lane bimbles, but… you can do it

Most of the Ultimate Goldie's engine essentials came straight off another shelf, from Phil Pearson's extensive range of replacement and upgraded components. Fans of classic racing will be familiar with the bikes Phil builds – typically they're ridden by blokes who scamper to the top step of the podium. In 2010, racer Clive Ling won the CRMC's Gold Star championship, scoring 54 podium finishes over the season and recording six lap records along with five race records. Chris was one of Phil and Clive's sponsors at the time, "so I knew how reliable his engines were and how much serious punishment they could take. Clive took no prisoners when he raced – combined with Phil's incredible engineering skills that's why he won so much". Hence it was an easy decision to go the whole hog with the engine spec for the Ultimate Goldie.

"I wanted it to be fitted with pretty much everything that Phil does. The engine is almost all-new, using all of the parts that Phil either makes himself or has specially made for him, including the head, barrel, flywheels, cams, etc." In fact it's easier to list the bits which aren't bespoke items – the crankcase and rockers "plus one or two other minor bits". Chris is adamant that a full engine rebuild is essential if you're restoring a Goldie.

"Anyone doing a Gold Star should have the engine properly and completely overhauled by a specialist, including replacing the crankshaft, especially if you're using an original crankcase. If you don't, then it will let go at some point with very serious consequences.

I've seen a couple when they have let go, and it's not a pretty sight. These engines were never designed to last this long and to endure what they have over all of these years. They were intended to be a race machine, one that was regularly stripped down and rebuilt." In other words, don't skimp and think you're saving. This is one bike where you can't avoid paying the piper. Phil's current price list quotes a grand for the labour of an engine rebuild with the price of the parts on top.

The engine spec on Chris's machine was based around the final DBD clubmans set up, an entirely different animal to the uprated Empire Star of 1937, and indeed a fairly far cry from the first postwar Goldie of 1948 which was, of course, a 350. Chris's Ultimate Gold Star also started out as a 350, but he figured that bigger would be better on modern roads. "We decided to build the engine to DBD specification as it is considered to be the ultimate Goldie, but I also wanted it taken out to 600cc because this gives dollops more torque, if not a great deal more at the top end."

This is where it helps to be collaborating with someone who has worked with Gold Stars for more than four decades, and who's clocked up around 50,000 miles on his own DBD over the past 20 years. Chris didn't need to go through a process of trial and error, because Phil had already done the research. Opting for a larger engine (Phil will build a 98 x 90mm 623cc engine if that's what the customer wants) gave Chris more flexibility on the gearbox front. He's all too well acquainted with the issues that surround the RRT2 four-speeder and BSA clutch. "I remember doing a club run on a Rocket Gold Star fitted with an RRT2 which lost the clutch completely in a traffic jam. I had to sit at the side of the road to wait for it to cool before taking off again – and that was a twin which generally requires less clutch slipping than the Gold Star.

"So the five-speed gearbox is worth serious consideration, especially if the owner lives in a built-up area. I opted against changing the gearbox for a five-speed unit because I felt that the 600cc motor could cope with the RRT2 on the road due to the extra torque. I was right: it can. We have even geared it up a bit to give it more legs at the top end. We fitted Phil's own clutch, which is much more capable of dealing with the heat generated by such a tall first gear. For me the RRT2 is fine because I ride straight out onto open roads. In heavy traffic or on slow club runs it can be a bit tedious although the clutch does cope admirably, especially compared with a standard one. I have never had anything like the problems suffered on the RGS that with this machine."

Next, Chris turned his attention to the thorny issue of starting a Gold Star. "Goldies have a reputation for being monsters to start," he agrees, "but in my experience it is largely pilot error. Most people who struggle seem to lack either the stature or the confidence to really go for it. A Gold Star responds to half-hearted efforts with real vengeance when they kick back, which in turn diminishes the rider's confidence further.

"I am fortunate enough to still be able to kick start a Gold Star without too much bother, so initially I decided not to have Phil's electric starter fitted. Then it occurred to me that when I get to the point that kick starting is a problem for me, Phil might not be supplying them any more so, I changed my mind and had a kit fitted."

This turned out to be £1500 well spent. "I am so glad I did because I rarely kick start the bike now. The electric starter works impeccably as long as the battery is kept well charged. The beauty of it is that it can be easily removed if originality becomes more of an issue, and it can't really be seen when fitted. I have created a stir on more than one occasion when a crowd gathers to see if I can start a Goldie! You have no worries with the electric leg. Hot or cold. Stalled at the lights, just press the button and you're away again. It saves a lot of embarrassment when the little monster decides to be cantankerous."

Cantankerous? Well, yes. Chris and Phil set out to build an Ultimate Gold Star, not a 'nice' one. It might be more suitable for modern roads than a 1960-spec machine, but this Goldie has lost none of its ferocity.

"All of the original Gold Star character is still very much present. Open country roads are its natural hunting ground, but it is perfectly capable of cruising in the overtaking lane on the motorway for mile after mile. It will even cope with city traffic to an extent, probably for longer than my wrists would manage."

Ah, yes, city traffic and motorway miles, both of which demand decent braking capabilities. "The bike was always intended to be ridden with enthusiasm," says Chris, "so I wanted to be able to stop properly. We fitted one of Phil's twin-leader front brake plates, which is similar to that originally designed by Eddie Dow, and what a difference that makes. It's generally accepted that the single-sided eight-inch Gold Star brake is probably better than the 190, which was an option. With the 2LS setup in the 190, it is superb."

After all this effort – and no small expense – we had to ask Chris if everything went smoothly when the Goldie was finally unleased. "When any machine is newly assembled there are inevitably some glitches to start with and this machine has been no exception," he admits, "but they have all been relatively minor and easily rectified.

"I am totally delighted with the entire machine. It is just what I hoped it would be. It is extremely tractable if it needs to be, yet has an impressive turn of speed for a big single. It feels totally bomb-proof when being ridden with enthusiasm and will cruise happily all day long at speeds in excess of the motorway limit without ever giving any hint of getting flustered. It rides as well as any really well-sorted Gold Star; the handling is way beyond my capability. It makes the glorious Goldie noise that no other machine can, especially on the over-run when the sound bounces back at you.

"The difference between this bike and a 'normal' Gold Star is that it works. It works in that it is reliable, it goes better and has a much nicer power delivery than the standard machine. It stops better and you can start it in an instant. It's no ordinary Gold Star. I spent a bit of time and effort tuning the bike to meet my requirements. It is now, without doubt, the best Gold Star I have ridden – and I have ridden quite a few as you can imagine. Phil and John have restored at least two other machines for me to a similar specification. I have to say that they are equally as good, but this one is mine and tuned to me so it feels nicer to me.

"I honestly can't think of anything else that I would want to do to it. I'm sure that it could be improved and modernised in many other ways but I didn't want to spoil the original package in terms of appearance and character. I believe we achieved that aim, because this bike looks pretty much like any other well-restored Gold Star. It isn't concours but that was never the intention, and it doesn't feel like a new bike. It feels just like a really good Gold Star … with a little bit extra.

"Phil once told me that if you get a really good Gold Star, you'll never want to sell it – and he was right. I have recently downsized my own collection because I didn't have time to ride and maintain them all, but the Goldie is not going anywhere. Not yet anyway…" CBG

ABOVE:
The BSA cries out for hard work. No no; it really does, and rewards serious grip twisting with serious GO

BELOW:
Thanks to Chris Spaett of Venture Classics for his considerable assistance in compiling this feature. The Goldie is Chris's own bike, so it's not for sale. Well. It wasn't for sale last time we checked…

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Benelli 750 Sei; 1975; UK Machine; extensive history file; runs and rides extremely well; very correct..... **£14,850**

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Douglas X90; 1950; exceptionally rare machine; very nicely restored; all road equipment included **£14,995**

John Player Norton 850cc; 1975; matching numbers; genuine 1,600 miles from new; unrestored; unique **£13,995**

Douglas 2¾ hp; 1922; very nicely restored some years ago & used since; still lovely; starts easily, runs well **£8,750**

Vincent Comet; 1951; original registration; not matching no's; excellent mechanically BTH Magneto..... **£14,850**

AJS Model 18; 1955; nice correct machine that runs & rides well **£4,250**
Benelli 500 Quattro; 1974; very early drum brake; very nicely restored..... **£5,750**
BSA Rocket 3 Mk2 (project); engine & carbs done by 3D Motorcycles at £5.3K **£7,850**
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Rudge TT Replica; 1933; matching no's; truly impeccable provenance; lovely **£39,995**
Triumph Daytona; 1970; Matching Numbers; 9,500 miles from new; very lovely **£6,350**
Triumph T120R Bonneville; 1970; Matching No's; older restoration but still lovely.... **£8,995**
Triumph TR5T Adventurer; 1972; not Matching No's; runs really well **£4,995**
Vincent Black Shadow; all matching no's including reg; Buff Log Book **£90,000**
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TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE
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It is a question of choice, a question of style

UP

Triumph's new Bonneville range includes a pair of T100s, one Black, the other less so. It's all a matter of choice...

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART PHOTOS BY JASON CRITCHELL

TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE T100 & T100 BLACK

After five years of diligent development in what Triumph's technical boss Stuart Wood says has been the largest engineering project the company has yet committed to under John Bloor's ownership, Britain's No.1 bike manufacturer has now completed the total overhaul of its born-again Bonneville range, which for 2017 comprises an array of 10 different models, on two distinct platforms.

So, alongside the five big-bore 1200cc variants (T120, T120 Black, Thruxton, Thruxton R and Bobber), the 900cc entry level Street Twin introduced a year ago has now been joined by the Bonneville T100 and T100 Black plus the Street Scrambler and Street Cup café racer, in the line-up of bikes powered by the smaller capacity single-cam version of Triumph's new generation liquid-cooled eight-valve parallel-twin motor.

The two T100 models are the only 900cc bikes in Triumph's catalogue to carry the Bonneville label denied to the less expensive Street Twin starter model. Yet all three have exactly the same mechanical specification, save for revised, slightly rangier steering geometry on the Bonneville T100 duo, which are also a not insignificant 15kg heavier than the Street Twin, with twice as many chrome-bezel clocks, and wire wheels instead of cast aluminium.

Apart from that, it's pretty hard to see where the extra kilos are carried on the T100, beyond the fact this is essentially a subtly more refined but basically also blinged-up version of Triumph's twin-cylinder base model, with a choice of black-is-beautiful or two-tone styling more redolent of the original line-up of Swinging Sixties Bonnevilles, compared with the Street Twin's cast-wheel Sizzling Seventies / Eager Eighties looks. For the T100, think The King instead of The Boss, as in Elvis not Springsteen, or The Beatles rather than ELO. That's been done by retaining the same basic structural components as on the Street Twin, but adroitly adapting them to deliver a quite different look, as well as subtly altered handling.

Right: It must be said that Triumph has hit its own trad look pretty well perfectly with this machine

Below: Even the mean black machine appears unscary to the natives

Above: Detailing works best when there's more of a contrast. How to enhance a gearbox, lesson #1

Right: That question again: should engines shine, or should they gleam?

"Our aim in differentiating between the two variants was to make the Street Twin more accessible for less experienced and/or shorter riders, including females," says Stuart Wood. "Hence the 40mm lower seat and the fact we've dropped the whole bike down on the suspension to lower it overall.

"Both fork and shocks are 10mm longer on the T100, and while both bikes have the same 120mm wheel travel front and rear, on the T100 we've tuned the suspension more for comfort, as well as altering the steering geometry for a slightly more relaxed ride."

So, out of the two, the T100 is the one you'd want to go touring on, or at least take on longer rides, whereas the Street Twin is what it says on the tin – tailored for streets, as compared to highways.

To evaluate that for myself I took a dry but chilly 120 mile early British winter's day ride aboard the smallest capacity Bonneville model now found in the Triumph catalogue, riding along the centre section of the 230 mile Fosse Way. This was the Roman road marking the northernmost frontier of that empire 2000 years ago, which linked Lincoln at its north-east boundary to Exeter in the south-west, and which runs as close as seven miles from Triumph's Hinckley factory. Though parts of the original Roman road can still clearly be seen, today it's a fabulous, well-surfaced biking road plunging up hill and down dale through the rolling Cotswold Hills, interspersed with wide-open stretches denoting the Roman trademark of straightlining their highways. The Fosse never strays more than six miles from a direct line drawn between Lincoln and Exeter, taking in scenic towns and pretty villages like Moreton-in-Marsh and Stow-on-the-Wold built in pale yellow Cotswold stone, en route to an afternoon cream tea at Huffkins in my turnaround town of Burford. Yes, indeed, how quintessentially English – just like the bike I was riding…

The T100's classically-styled 40mm taller 790mm high seat has well-chosen padding for a comfier mile-eating posture, and combines with the relatively wide, flat one-piece steel handlebar – with adjustable brake and clutch levers – to deliver a super comfortable, highly rational riding stance. It's that bit more spacious than the Street Twin's for a 5ft 10in rider, even if I can't really say I ever felt cramped on Triumph's entry level model. But I am always aware when riding that bike how low-slung it is, and even though the T100 shares the same frame that's narrowed where it meets the fuel tank, thus making it easy for shorter riders to place both feet flat on the floor at stoplights, you do feel you're sitting higher on it – as indeed you are. This means there's more room for your legs to meet the footrests, which feel to be set slightly rearwards, encouraging you to ride with

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your toes parked on the pegs, and knees tucked in tight to grasp the flanks of the slightly larger, 14.5 litre reshaped fuel tank that comes complete with grip panels, another 1960s design cue to match the rubber gaiters on the KYB fork and the retro-looking round mirrors which give a good view, and don't vibe. This is yet another new Triumph it feels good to be aboard.

Thumb the cleverly combined killswitch and starter button to send the liquid-cooled engine throbbing into life, and be prepared to sit there for a moment relishing the unexpectedly glorious note of the T100's period-looking peashooter exhaust silencers. This may be a Euro 4 compliant package, but it sounds way better than its old twincam Bonneville predecessor ever did. It's soon apparent once you get under way that this version of Triumph's new 900cc parallel-twin motor has a little more zip than in Street Twin guise, even if quoted power output is the same at 54bhp at 5900rpm. "The peashooter exhausts may flow a little freer, but having liquid-cooling has enabled us to map the engine slightly differently while still meeting Euro 4 compliance," says Stuart Wood. "But it does sound good, doesn't it?"

Goes well, too. Sitting astride the T100 is a very untiring place to be, thanks to the complete lack of vibration at any revs from the all-new parallel-twin motor with its 270° crank, up to and including the soft-action 7200rpm redline – and here there's a tacho fitted, unlike on the Street Twin. Yet the engine

has heaps of character in spite of its smoothness and hyper-flexibility, and thanks to that perky exhaust note it's far from being the two-wheeled electric sewing machine you might expect it to be.

How flexible is that? Well, the T100 is essentially a semi-automatic, because you can crack the throttle wide open at 1800rpm in fifth/top gear, and it'll pull cleanly all the way to the 7200rpm limiter with zero transmission snatch. This makes gear changing strictly optional once under way, even if the lever action of the cable-operated oil-bath slip/assist clutch is so extremely light and ultra-controllable that you can literally operate it with your little finger. But you can ride through towns in top gear if you're too lazy to change down – it really makes no difference to forward motion, and you won't find the Triumph lurching beneath you in protest if you do.

This makes riding in traffic or city streets completely untiring, with no undue wear and tear on your left hand owing to an unreasonably stiff clutch action. As on the Street Twin, the clean-shifting five-speed gearbox is fully up to Japanese quality, and that light, precise clutch action renders it easy to make smart getaways from traffic lights or stop signs, even if it does have just three-quarters of the horsepower of the outgoing 865cc Bonnie. If you want more, Triumph will refer you to its array of 1200cc models, in a dealer showroom near you. But what matters most in real world riding like my Fosse fling is the claimed 18% more torque from the new motor than on the outgoing model, peaking as low as 3230rpm when 59lb-ft (80Nm) is available, and thereafter widely spread across the whole rev range. Just as on the Street Twin, it's really noticeable how much more low down grunt there is on this new 900cc bike versus the old 865cc Bonneville.

You can feel the subtle difference in engine mapping between the two as the T100 builds power progressively to 4000 revs, at which point it starts to accelerate notably faster, whereas the Street Twin

Top: When opportunity presents, just go mild in the country

1, 2, 3 & 4: When Black is all you need, you may as well have lots of it

5 & 6: Modern, minimal, effective and reliable

7: All the bright lights you need…

8: …although even here a little darkness is an option

9: Clocks come no clearer than this. Classic style and all the info you need

is more linear in its march to the redline. On both bikes the power delivery is friendly and controllable at all times, even from a closed throttle in the bottom two gears where the bike that's probably its main commercial rival, the similarly made-in-Thailand (well, except for Euro-customers) Ducati Scrambler, is still inflicted with the snatchy low-down pickup it's always had and that's so disconcerting.

The Street Twin I rode a year ago did have a similar response in second gear from a closed throttle, but on the T100 Triumph has fixed the only real dynamic criticism I had of that bike. By the way, five speeds in the Triumph's gearbox are quite sufficient for something this torquey – I never caught myself looking for another ratio.

The T100's handling is capable and confidence inspiring, as well as intuitive. I liked the effect of its more relaxed geometry numbers versus the Street Twin, which results in beautifully weighted steering – it just slips effortlessly into a turn almost as soon as you've even thought about weighting the handlebar. No, that's not hyperbole – go and try it for yourself at your local Triumph dealer, then tell me I'm wrong! This makes it a very untiring bike to ride, although a bit like the similarly effortless-handling BMW Scrambler, purely for safety reasons you need to avoid over-relaxing on the T100, and keep your mind on the job!

The 11mm longer wheelbase versus the Street Twin gives a little bit of added stability, without heavying-up the steering, and even with a slightly higher cee of gee than its sister bike, the T100 rides bumps well on the angle, and is almost as agile in flicking from side to side through a succession of bends.

The Triumph's brakes are excellent, and using a single finger to work the lever is fine even for panic

stops – just make sure it's your right hand's forefinger doing the job, rather than its little one! In spite of asking just a single 310mm front disc and 255mm rear, each gripped by a twin-piston Nissin caliper, to stop a bike weighing a reasonably hefty 213kg dry from relatively high speed, I can confirm that the T100's brake package will do the business when called upon to stop in panic mode (thanks to Farmer Joe or whatever his name was for allowing me to sample that, after stopping abruptly when he saw a chum in the front garden of a house in Stretton-under-Fosse!).

The rear brake was also set up just right – you have to press down on the foot lever quite a long way to make it work, but when it does it's effective without being excessive. Nice. But the single front disc not only reduces cost and speeds up the steering thanks to a reduced gyroscopic effect, it also enhances suspension response, because of the reduction in unsprung weight.

And once again, Triumph's chassis development guru David Lopez has done a great job in teaming with Kayaba's technicians to produce a twin-shock motorcycle with non-adjustable suspension damping front and rear (just for preload on the latter), which has a level of compliance that's worthy of a

more expensive, more sophisticated variable-rate monoshock bike. Triumph already did a good job on the Street Twin, but ride quality is even better on the T100, which comes with controlled compliance and won't bottom out even over the most serious of bumps. When you go for your demo ride to verify my comments about the T100's steering, check out the suspension settings and tell me you're not impressed with them!

Although Triumph has opted for some reason in its marketing push to present the T100 as a downsized version of its 1200cc T120 big brother, in reality it's much more than that. This is a standalone model in its own right, and a very good one, too. The only question is whether customers should save the £800 price difference by buying a Street Twin and maybe dipping into Triumph's 150-strong list of dealer accessories with the money saved. A combination of superior looks and enhanced dynamics, plus that taller seat and the glorious aria from the peashooter pipes, would have me opting for the T100 – but it's a close call. For urban use, I'd take the Street Twin, which would also perhaps lend itself better to being customised, or at the very least personalised.

That dilemma comes from the fact that these torquey twins are both very good motorcycles – and well-priced ones, at that. Real world rides like Triumph's new family of Bonneville models are now once again the new normal in the post-Supersport era now upon us.

Either way, each is enhanced by the addition of electronic riding aids including switchable ABS and traction control plus a ride-by-wire throttle, making them successful modern reinterpretations of Triumph's most iconic model on the 60th birthday of the feat which led to its creation. For, 60 years on from Johnny Allen's September 1956 feat of setting a new two-wheeled world land speed record at 214.40mph on the Bonneville Salt Flats, in a streamliner powered by an unsupercharged twin-cylinder 650cc Triumph motor, Triumph has given the bikes which commemorate that achievement an emphatic and welcome new lease of life.

Above: At rest

Top right: Add a little colour…

Right: If we were forced to choose…

STUART WOOD SPEAKS

Making a 21st century Bonneville

JOHN BLOOR HIMSELF aside, Triumph's head of engineering, Stuart Wood, 52, is its longest serving employee, a 29-year company veteran who joined the design team in 1987, three whole years before the appearance a quarter of a century ago of the first three- and four-cylinder models bearing the revived British brand's historic badge.

He was there when the born-again Bonneville made what for many customers was a belated debut in 2000, when Bloor decided he'd re-established Triumph sufficiently well as a thoroughly modern mainstream manufacturer which could now afford to look in the rear view mirror of history by introducing a modern interpretation of its most iconic Swinging Sixties model.

Sixteen years on from there he's headed the development team which has once again reinvented the Bonneville, making the chance to talk to him about his team's hard work all the more timely.

AC: Stuart, when did you and your guys in Triumph R&D start work on this born again version of the born again Bonneville?

SW: The first discussions took place in 2011, when we knew that with Euro 4 coming in we were going to be working on either an update of the existing bike, or an all-new model. We saw the original styling proposal in May 2012, and it all moved on from there. So it's taken five years of painstaking development to get to this point, and for sure it's been the largest engineering project we've yet undertaken at Hinckley.

AC: So was Euro 4 the trigger for creating these bikes?

SW: It was initially, in that one way or another we were going to have to hit tighter emissions and noise targets, and incorporate ABS as standard. But by the time you've repackaged and updated the existing model to incorporate that, you've almost redesigned the whole bike anyway, so the opportunity was always there to do something more with the range by developing a 1200cc version which we really thought would be wanted by customers. So we took the opportunity to build an all-new engine platform that would allow both 900cc and 1200cc versions.

AC: Is there any part of the new engine that's a carry-over from the old one?

SW: I was going to say no, but there may be a nut, bolt or washer in common – but nothing else! Really, there was no intention to carry anything over at all, although obviously the basic architecture is essentially the same, being driven by the visual layout of the engine.

But there are some fundamental differences, the main one being the fact that it's liquid-cooled, although from the outside of the bike no one would tell the difference. We've always strategically cooled the cylinder head via an oil cooler, but now we have water cooling instead to also cool the cylinders. Of course, the fins are still doing some of the work, but the metal temperature is not as high as if it had been air-cooled.

AC: So that's allowed you to downsize the radiator, which is extremely well disguised!

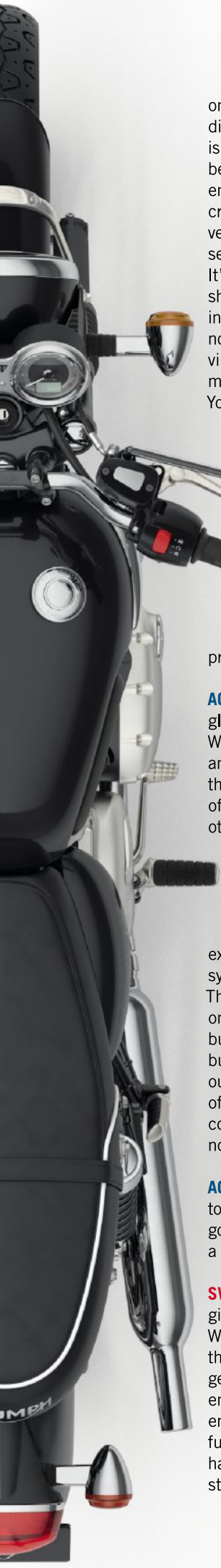
SW: Interesting word, that – because when you say disguised, we have in fact done the exact opposite! We haven't put shrouds around it, we haven't tried to cover it up – we've just mounted an honest radiator in full view and packaged it the most sensible way, which is two tanks top and bottom so we can take the water hoses directly to the engine at each end, so you don't see any plumbing. It's all internal waterways in the engine, with very short external rubber hoses for a clean appearance.

AC: What other considerations did you have in designing the new engine?

SW: The fact that it was going to be 1200cc as well as 900cc meant we had to design the whole engine with that in mind. The 1200 has a bigger bore, a different cylinder head, and we're running a decompressor as well on that but not on the 900, where the layout is the same and the crankcases are identical.

AC: When riding it, the engine's incredibly smooth, even more so than the previous Bloor Bonneville. Have you got a different counterbalancer arrangement?

SW: The mechanical strategy for primary balance is exactly the same, with twin gear driven balance shafts front and rear which rotate in the same direction as



one another, but in the opposite direction to the crank. So the engine is 100% primary balanced, and because we wanted a more refined engine, we've gone for a 270° crank on both 900 and 1200 versions, which gives you full secondary balance naturally. It's important the engine should seem more refined in terms of vibration – nobody wants mechanical vibrations nowadays masquerading as 'character'. You want some character, you want to feel the firing impulses, but not at the expense of undue vibration. So a 360° motor was never on the cards – sorry, purists, but it was time to move all the bikes to 270°, and we have a lovely exhaust sound which is pretty refined.

AC: All the new Triumph twins sound glorious when you're riding them. Was that one of your key targets, and how did you succeed in doing that despite the noise requirements of Euro 4 which have forced some other manufacturers to mount really intrusive and heavy exhaust systems?

SW: I'll admit it took a lot of hard work just constantly experimenting with different exhaust systems on a trial and error basis. The guys did some predictive work on sound quality as well as quantity, but when it comes down to it actually building exhausts and trying them out is how you get it right. So many of our engineers ride bikes, they completely get what we're looking for, not just in sound.

AC: What other parameters were key to designing the new engine? You've got fantastic fuel economy – was that a target?

SW: Everything comes together to give the fuel consumption figure. We've gone for a ride by wire throttle, and that's enabled us to get the responsiveness from the engine while meeting increased emission restrictions yet with good fuel economy, plus all the bikes now have switchable traction control as standard.

AC: What other considerations were important at the design stage?

SW: One thing we really wanted to do on the layout, even with the larger capacity version, was to keep the engine height down.

So fixing the bore and stroke was the driver for that – if you can get the stroke shorter then you can have shorter conrods, and everything shrinks quite a lot. Basically, the bore and stroke we've chosen and the cylinder head packaging have kept the engine height down, so we've gone to a single overhead cam rather that a twincam design, with the chain at the top and gear at the bottom – we didn't want a large chain run at the top sticking out of a nice cam cover.

Another benefit from the single cam is the aesthetics of the cylinder head, because what we've done is to expose the two outer cylinder head bolts on either side, and we've got vertical fins there as well, which are all fairly evocative as sort-of borrowed from our heritage. Obviously you've got your spark plugs and spark plug caps on show as well, so it makes the whole top of the engine look really pretty in a traditional way.

AC: That extends to the throttle body, which you've made resemble a carb.

SW: Yes, it's just a single 38mm throttle body on the 900 engine, but twin bodies on the 1200, and that's all about tuning the engine the way we wanted it to behave. We knew from talking to our customers and people who aren't our customers but might be, that for this bike the maximum power figure didn't matter so much, because what people want is torque and drivability in the part of the rev range they're used to using, which is bottom to midrange. So what we went for was more power and torque in the midrange, and once you've made that decision you can then optimise throttle body size and port size to flow correctly at that point in the rev range. That way we can get higher gas velocity and better mixing within the cylinder, and thus cleaner combustion, which gives the rideability people are looking for.

AC: It's most noticeable when you ride the 900 motor how much more torque there is low down, especially compared with the old Bonneville.

SW: Absolutely, and improved response, too. Keihin is great to work with – its contribution is key to this.

AC: The 900 models have a five-speed gearbox – why not a six-speeder with a smaller capacity engine which needs to be rowed along more on the gearbox?

SW: We've got a six-speed on the 1200, but again the 900 models are nice, nippy, rideable bikes which feel more appropriate with a five-speed transmission and nicely spaced gear ratios.

AC: When you sit on the T100 it's immediately apparent that you're sitting pretty low down – presumably thanks to the reduced height of the engine you spoke about earlier. But the whole bike seems pretty low to the ground, even if there are no ground clearance problems at respectable angles of lean. Was it a conscious decision to try and get a low cee of gee?

SW: Absolutely. The whole bike had to be manageable, and to achieve that you're looking at a complete package where everything has to work together. So from the outset it's all about ergonomics – when you're designing a bike, ergonomics, geometry and weight distribution are the three main targets initially, and how you go about controlling that with suspension, brakes, wheels and tyre sizes is the next stage.

But the fundamental layout was always about trying to get that sense of manageability. With this model, the 900, we've made the riding position slightly more engaging – so we want the rider to sit forward into the bike, and be part of it, whereas on the T120 there's more of an upright relaxed position. We wanted it to be a more engaging stance on the T100, so we've allowed enough space for the rider to move around. We've had many taller guys saying it's perfectly comfortable – just move back on the seat if you want more room, because there is space to move about. Ergonomics rule!

Just because a bike has classic styling, it shouldn't be compromised when it comes to developing the chassis and providing good handling. From the dynamic point of view we targeted the character, feel and performance we wanted for each of the new Bonneville models, especially to incorporate the agility that our bikes are famous for, and to get the neutrality and stability our customers want. On the T100 we've focused on making it more accessible and fun to ride, without being in any way demanding of the rider.

AC: Why fit an 18 inch front wheel, when the previous cast-wheel Bonnie had 17 inchers front and rear?

SW: Partly aesthetics. We've tried to be as faithful as we can to the looks of the original Bonneville, and I think we now have a more elegant model than before. When you put them side by side you can see the purer line and stance of the new bike, and wheels and tyres are a part of that. Pirelli put a lot of effort in working with us on tyre development as well, producing numerous prototype tyres for us to evaluate. That's what it takes to make the bike as good as it can be, and it's great to have partners like that.

AC: You and your guys produced the first born-again T100 Bonneville in 2000, and here you are redoing it a decade and a half later. Are you expecting this one to have a similarly long shelf life?

SW: It would be nice, because it's a bike with timeless styling and character. The thing about having to recreate or redesign an iconic product is that people think it's easy – well, you've already got that design there to copy, so what's the problem? In fact, the amount of engineering and aesthetic design work that goes into being faithful to the original iconic model while packaging a thoroughly modern motorcycle incorporating all the technology which by definition you can't put on display because it's modern and right up to date, means there's that much more work entailed in taking it to the next stage than having a free hand to come up with whatever you like without the restrictions of the previous model.

But it's a lovely challenge, and I think the reason why developing the whole Bonneville range down the years has been such an involving project for our design and manufacturing people, and why everyone who's been involved with this redesign has enjoyed it, is because we've had to deliver something that's beautiful while paying due respect to the model's traditions, as I believe these new bikes do.

We started out with the intention of building a range of Bonnevilles for the 21st century – not any kind of a pastiche, but a real Bonneville for today's roads that draws from the DNA of the model down the years to make it more beautiful and desirable, particularly in the detail. Porsche has always been a master of doing this with the 911 family, and I hope people will consider we've done something comparable with all our new Bonneville models.

We were actually lucky enough in a way that we needed to incorporate new technology on it to meet Euro 4, and so we redesigned it in a way which I believe has made it a much improved bike that looks better, rides better and is obviously completely up to date, technologically speaking. So let's see how that handles the passage of time! CBG

Triumph's Stuart Wood poses with one he made earlier

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We have a lot to thank the Yanks for. There's the Big Mac, the King Size bed, the XXL T-shirt… and the Norton Dominator 99. America is where size matters and big is better.

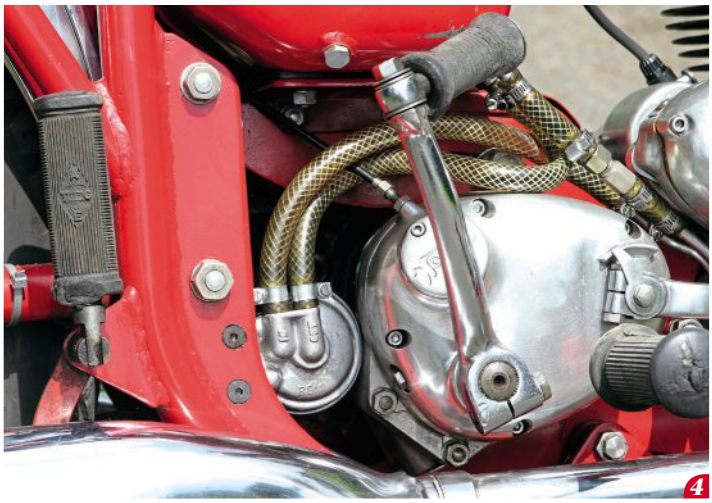
Norton jumped on the vertical twin cavalcade in 1948 with the 500cc Model 7 Dominator, a sweet running twin with a top speed approaching 100mph. When Bracebridge Street swapped plunger suspension for the swinging arm Featherbed frame in time for the 1952 season the Dominator 88 even handled like a racer on the road.

But that wasn't enough for our American cousins – they were used to 1200cc Panhead Harleys and Indian Chiefs. And as far as they were concerned, 'there ain't no substitute for cubes'. So in 1956 Norton announced the Dominator 88's Big Brother – the 99. The engine had been bored and stroked to give 596cc. It was enough to lift the top speed over the magic 100mph – but it still wasn't enough for the Yanks.

World DOMINATION!

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY PHILLIP TOOTH

We really have got something to thank the Yanks for...



Next up was a 650 version in 1964, before the venerable twin was enlarged once again to 750cc and slotted into the Commando's vibration-damping Isolastic frame. And then came the 850…

Some people just don't know when to stop. But there's one American who knows that smaller can be better – even though he wears XXL T-shirts.

Pennsylvanian Kenny Smith usually rides an Indian Chief and keeps a classic Harley in his garage for when he wants something to fix. But after a couple of weeks touring Ireland on a borrowed 500cc BSA Star Twin he realised that little Brit iron could be every bit as special as large American V-twins. He started looking for a vertical twin of his own – preferably a Norton. But which model should he go for?

Ken's search ended when a friend offered him a red Dominator 99. With less than 8000 miles on the speedometer it didn't matter that the paintwork was scuffed and faded. What struck Ken was the condition of the mechanicals – it looked as if nobody outside the factory had ever laid a spanner on a nut. Even the chrome was in good condition.

1: This is an engine. You know this is true. It is a 596cc Norton twin, in great shape before getting stretched to 745cc and even beyond

2: Kinetic energy can be hard to shift. The 8in full-width Norton stopper is perfectly capable of dissipating that energy, even in its original sls form

3: The most famous forks in the world? Possibly

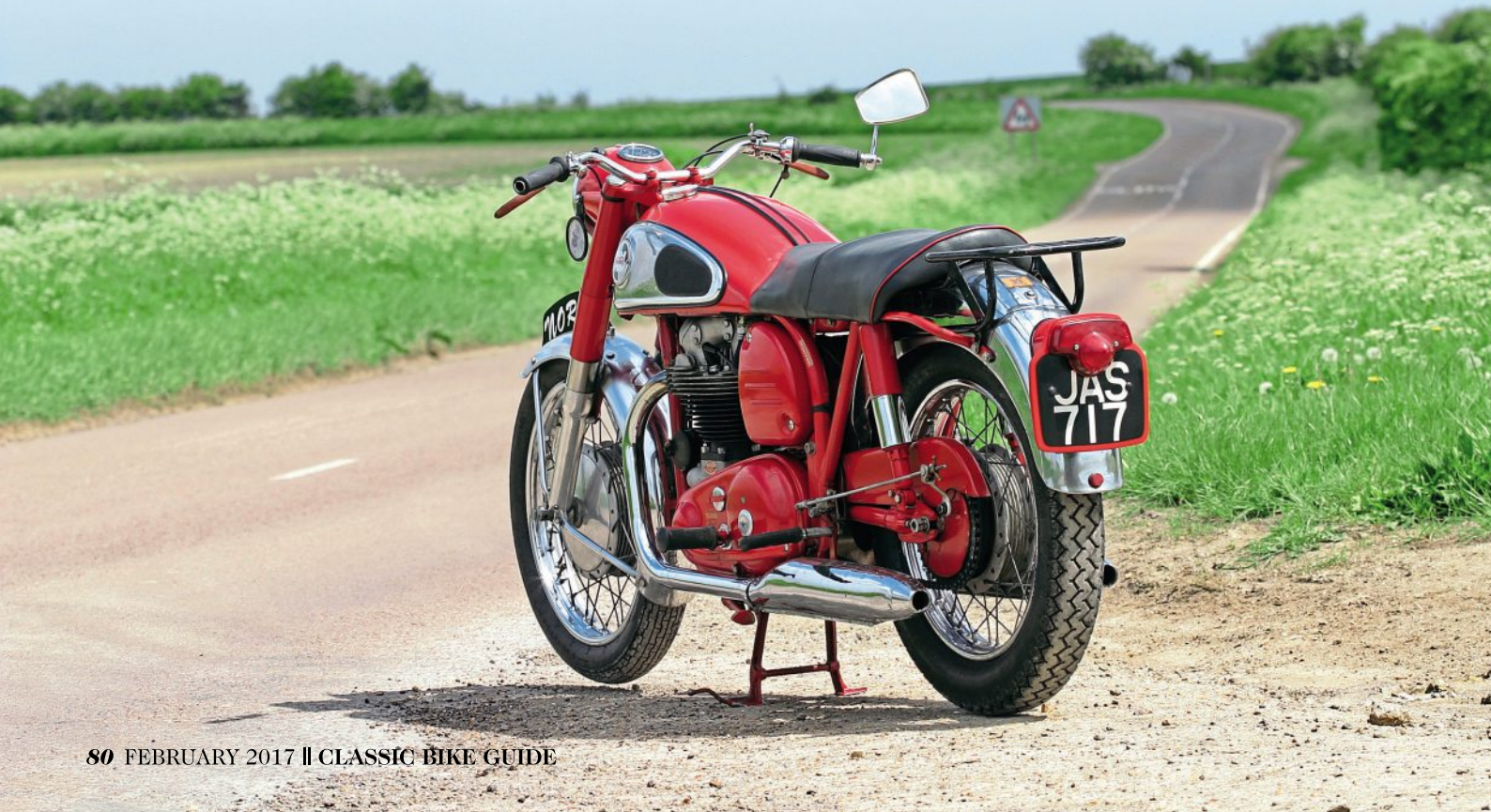
4: An AMC/Norton gearbox. Well up to 850 Commando power, so unstressed by the 99. Check out the external oil filter (we approve) and the in-line non-return valve (those less so)

Below: Wideline 99 in red, sir? That will do nicely. No need to wrap it…

With such a low mileage some people might have just given the old Domi 99 an oil change and put it back into service, but not Ken. He likes to do things properly. And anyway, he didn't want to be stuck at the side of the road in the middle of some faraway country where the locals don't speak American, or know the difference between Wendy's and Taco Bell.

Ken completely stripped the engine and gearbox to make sure there were no horror stories lurking inside. That's when he found that the cylinders needed re-boring and oversize pistons needed to be fitted. He put the wear down to the dusty conditions in the farm country where the first owner lived. "Road dust will wear out the carb and your cylinder bores in no time at all," observes Ken.

While the crankcases were split he replaced the main bearings, even though they felt fine. The only modification he made was to fit an external oil filter. The chassis was also stripped and the cycle parts treated to a new coat of paint, and the missing Lucas tail-light was replaced with a later version. Although the exhausts polished up nicely the silencers were



5: The featherbed's unusual (for its time) twin-loop construction is clear in this shot. Its fuel tank sits above the frame's top rails, rather than astride a single tube, as was more common

6: Stock Lucas period headlamp arrangement is only improved by the addition of a silver quarter-dollar to replace the 'King of the Road' badge

replaced. Oh, and he personalised his motorcycle by gluing an America quarter dollar in the headlamp shell where the Lucas chrome button should be.

With new tyres and a battery installed the Domi 99 was crated and shipped to England in plenty of time for its first 2000-mile Irish tour before a quick ride around France. That's where Ken was surprised by the famous French cuisine – one expensive bistro in the medieval town of Arras served up a steak that he described as "tougher than my engineer boots, and they have steel toe caps!"

The nice thing about vertical twins is that, provided they don't have sky-high compression ratios and lumpy cams, they always start easily. And this Domi 99 is no exception. Just push the petrol tap on – it's simple to know which way is on, even in the dark, as the Enots tap has one round end and one hexagon end. Push round for off, and hexag – on. Get it? Now give the Monobloc the lightest tickle and kick. That's all there is to it.

When I first rode this Domi the clutch was a bit too heavy for my liking. I checked that it was set up correctly, turning in the screw on the clutch pressure plate until it touched the pushrod and then backing it out half a turn before locking it and adjusting the cable to give ⅛in of free play at the handlebar. It was spot on. Then I noticed the clutch and brake levers, with their nice period plastic sleeves. They had centres for the cable nipple and fulcrum pin that measured 1⅛in instead of the correct ⅞in as specified in the handbook. That explained it. Ken says the levers were on the bike when he got it but I found the correct pair and swapped them before his next big ride. Enough talk. Let's use some petrol before the Yanks drain the last barrel.

This is a tractable twin and you can woofle along in top at just 25mph while enjoying the scenery, but sometimes you just have to go for a blast. Then you can hold on to second gear way past 60 before snicking into third and powering to 80mph. Use fourth gear to the limit and you'll see the Smiths needle flick to an honest 100mph on the cheapest lead-free. On motorways the Domi will sit at 75 all day long and it doesn't vibrate even when you cruise at closer to 90, but this motorcycle wasn't built for a boring life on the straight and wide. This bike belongs on the twisties.

Pictures in a RESTORATION

If you have never ridden a Featherbed Norton then beg, borrow or steal a ride. You will be stunned by how well a motorcycle that is approaching 60 years old can handle. There is no hinge hidden in the middle of this chassis and, dear BMW rider, nobody has ever likened riding a Norton to riding a rubber cow.

You can carry a lot more speed into a bend than most other classics, and that means you cover distances deceptively quickly. Yes, you can ground out the prop stand on the left, but you've got to be trying.

Even the brakes are impressive. The full-width 8in front and 7in rear operate smoothly and with enough

power to squeal rubber if you forget finesse. It's nice to know that when you are cruising at speed you are relying on the same stoppers as the 650SS. What's more, the brakes are waterproof – an important consideration if you are planning to tour Ireland. Why are people always surprised at how green the place is?

The Norton is also easy on the pocketbook. Ken usually gets at least 60mpg and he checks the oil every morning but only expects to top it up once before its 1500-mile oil change.

On one big trip Ken's Domi was ridden to London, Paris, Rome, Venice, Saltsburg, Prague, Berlin, Brussels and Amsterdam before returning to Cambridge, where the bike was treated to new clutch driving plates and a new rear chain. Then it was off to Edinburgh before visiting Wales and Ireland – a grand tour of 6900 miles. Did it ever break down? Well, yes. The fibre pinion that drives the dynamo stripped its teeth. Thank goodness for magneto ignition – a couple of bicycle lights clipped front and rear were good ➧

Below: Ken Smith and his bright red Dominator. They do touring. Big touring. The Norton has no concerns about that, not at all

enough for the last 500 miles home. The following year Ken returned to Ireland before touring Wales and clocking up another 2700 miles in two weeks. Towards the end of the trip he was plagued by a low-speed misfire that was traced to a badly worn magneto pick-up brush. That didn't stop the Domi carrying Ken safely home, where a mag strip revealed a slip ring that was breaking up. The magneto was completely rebuilt ready for Ken's next big trip.

So is Ken happy with his choice of Brit iron? You bet. "I am seriously impressed by the way this little 600 hauls my heavyweight butt and enough luggage for a long tour. I have to pack carefully. I can't get too many T-shirts in a pannier and still have room for my XXL shorts!" CBG

Three great classics touring the heights of Wales. And yes, the middle machine really is a Gold Star

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British Classic Buyer's Guide

Buying a classic bike is easy, although identifying which classic is your own particular dream bike may be less so. What is also easy – too easy – is to get the exact spec wrong, or the price wrong. There are, for example, many different Triumph Bonnevilles, and if you decide that your life will only be complete if shared with a Bonnie then you need to know which sort of Bonnie you want to share it with. It all sounds simple, but it's not. Sometimes. If you know you want a 1965 T120TT and nothing else, you'll be fine.

Sticking with the Bonnie idea, if you want the whole 1950s Rocker thing, complete with pre-unit charm, genuine Edward Turner styling and a glorious tangerine paint job, then you are not going to be happy with a 1972 T120 rather than a T120 from 1959 or so. This applies to all marques and all models. Before you spend your money, go ride a few of the bikes on your shortest short list. Join the relevant owners' club – that part is essential; join the club before you spend your money – so you can meet owners, maybe even ride their bikes, and learn about the reality of life with your dream bike.

It is always a great idea to study prices too. Stay aware of the movements in the market; it's so much better to buy a Bonnie for Bantam money than the other way around!

And if you need specific advice, don't hesitate to ask us here at Classic Bike Guide; we've bought more bikes than most between us, and made most of the mistakes, too…

How to use the guide

This guide is as exhaustive as we could fit into our pages. We'll update it two or three times a year as we trawl the marketplace, and this Britbike guide alternates with a Japanese guide as well as a survey of European classics. We offer you just two prices; the CBG High Price is for a top-notch, top-spec model in excellent condition. You might not win concours awards with the bike, but you'd expect to be a contender. At that price, your target machine should have a new MoT, its tyres should sparkle, its chrome and alloy should be excellent. Its paint should not be dull, and it should run like the dream machine you're after. Oil should not dribble from its casings, it should start easily and readily. If it has more than one carb, then they should be balanced and the bike should tick over reliably. There should be no smoke, and although a stack of receipts is not essential, you should find evidence that whoever did the restoration work knew what they were doing. Cables should be entirely un-frayed, the controls should fall readily to hand and foot, and the lighting system should both lighten the darkness and charge its own battery. Accept nothing less.

Also accept that if you make the increasingly astute decision to buy from a trader then you are quite likely to pay more than our High Price. Traders make a living supplying folk like us with the bikes we want, tolerate endless tyre-kicking, usually accept trade-ins, and they should provide decent after-sales service. All this costs them, and they need to make a profit.

The CBG Low Price is for a complete motorcycle. The bike may have the dregs of an MoT. It will certainly run and ride, although it may not be entirely sorted. Most of all, it may not be standard, the engine and frame may not have been paired in the factory, it may be cosmetically challenged, with rusty exhausts, a split seat and drooping unlubricated cables, and sundry systems may not work. It may be a less popular version of a popular model: that 1971 'tall' T120 Bonneville springs to mind. It may easily be what we used to refer to as a 'working' bike. Classic workers are less common now than they once were, but they are still about.

There are two other categories which it is entirely impossible to quote prices for. The first is the entirely original and unrestored motorcycle. These machines are – obviously – increasingly hard to find, and some folk will pay a high premium for them. Indeed, 'barn find' machines often fetch astonishingly high prices because they're unrestored … although you can rarely know that for a fact. Lots of older, 1980s, say, restorations are passed off as 'original' barn finds. Often they're not original at all.

The second category is the concours winner; the completely elegant machine which is better by far than it was when it first invaded a showroom. When these bikes change hand in the public marketplace (and many of them change hands inside clubs, advertised only by word of mouth) their prices can be very high indeed. We cannot offer guidance here; what you pay is up to you.

Happy hunting…

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AJS & MATCHLESS

By 1950, Associated MotorCycles Limited in South London were building bikes under both AJS and Matchless badges, and at one time boasted the largest factory in the world dedicated to motorcycles production. They later acquired the Norton marque, at first keeping production in Birmingham but eventually moving Norton in with AJS and Matchless. AMC also built James and Francis-Barnett motorcycles (also in the Midlands and not at Plumstead). So the varied range of models offered under the AMC banner stretched from 98cc 2-strokes all the way through to stonking 750cc 4-stroke superbikes. The company was also successful in two-wheeled sports, and apart from the dedicated and highly specialised road-racers they also built a lot of competition-biased roadsters. The whole lot collapsed in 1966, and was reborn as Norton-Villiers, concentrating on the Norton Commando series and a range of 2-stroke AJS off-roaders.

Model designations are shown for AJS, with Matchless equivalents shown in brackets, as the two marques increasingly differed only in finish and trim styles. The bikes are very solid, well-engineered and rewarding to ride. Spares are plentiful, and they boast an excellent and very active Owners' Club.

Model 14 (Matchless G2)

248cc (70 x 65mm) ohv single || 340lb || 75mph || 1958-66

AMC UNDERSTOOD THAT they needed a lightweight 4-stroke motorcycle to rival Triumph's Cub and BSA's C-range. Intelligently, they used a bicycle based on their James 2-strokes and designed their own new 4-stroke engine to fit. That engine appeared to be of 'unit' construction (where engine and gearbox are built into shared castings), but the gearbox was separate and cylindrical, attached to the crankcases by a pair of steel straps. The 250s and the similar 350s were not a commercial success and are not widely sought-after today. However, they are fun to ride (CSR 250s in particular) and offer a low-cost intro to classic motorcycling with plentiful spares and simple construction for straightforward spannering. The best are the AMC-forked versions and the late CSRs. As with most AMC models, the 250 was available in standard, 'S' (chrome mudguards), CS (off-road styling), and CSR (café-racer) versions.

Prices
low £1500 || high £2500

Model 8 (Matchless G5)

348cc (72 x 82.5mm) ohv single || 350lb || 70mpg || 80mph || 1960-62

BIGGER VERSION OF the Model 14, built with better forks taken from the early 1950s heavyweight but with a slightly feeble brake from the 2-stroke range. They provide a better ride than the early 250s, although by 1962 there was nothing between them apart from better torque. The 350s didn't last long as they competed with AMC's own heavyweight 350 singles, without being better, just slightly lighter. Surprisingly quick and pleasant to ride.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £2750

Model 16 (Matchless G3)

348cc (69 x 93mm until 1963, then 72 x 85.5mm) ohv single || 400lb || 80mpg || 75mph || 1945-66

MATCHLESS G3, 350cc, 1967. Barn find with 1 former keeper. Stood since 1984, brakes free and not seized. Perfect restoration project. V5. Engine turns over but won't fire. Mileage 29340. SOLD FOR £2500

SOUNDLY ENGINEERED AND finished trad Brit single. AMC singles are immensely strong, engineered to cover countless miles with little maintenance and no complaint. They started as rigid machines very close to the wartime Matchless WD G3L, then switched to swinging arm suspension. The late 50s models with alternator lighting and half-decent brakes matched to fine handling are the most common, although the rigid-framed models have a considerable minimalist cachet. Also unusual although not particularly popular are the 1964-on versions, with their (relatively) short-stroke engine, Norton forks and wheels. Rigids fetch the highest prices, but spares for the later ones are easier. Very easy bike to live with; very few faults.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £2750 (CS comp models a lot more)

Model 18 (Matchless G80)

498cc (82.5 x 93mm until 1963, then 86 x 85.5mm) ohv single || 400lb || 55mpg || 80mph || 1945-66

THE 500 VERSION of the very trad AMC single really is a bigger version of the 350, with a bit more of everything. Excellent riders' machines; classic in every way. They share almost all the components apart from the piston, flywheels, barrel and head with the smaller engine, which gives them a tendency to knock out some pattern big ends very quickly. However, this is not the problem it was, as the quality of AMC spares continues to improve. This is a pleasant touring motorcycle, with good handling and comfort allied to a relaxed 60mph cruising speed. It's easy to convert a 350 single to a 500 as the strokes are the same, but to run smoothly they need the 500's flywheels too…

Prices:
low £2400 || high £4000 (CS comp models a lot more)

Model 20 (Matchless G9)

498cc (66 x 72.8mm) ohv twin || 410lb || 60mpg || 90mph || 1948-61

AMC'S TWIN TOOK a different path to the already established designs from BSA, Triumph, etc.

So the engines are unusual, having a third main bearing between the cylinders, and separate barrels and cylinder heads. The engine is a notably clean design, with no external oil plumbing to spoil the lines and leak at the joints. It was never particularly popular with the sporting riders, although it was a handsome motorcycle and reliable enough. There were no rigid-framed or plunger-framed twins. Gradual development included the switch from a Burman gearbox to one of AMC's own design (aka the Norton gearbox, which went on to handle the power of the Commando!) in 1956. The 'jampot' rear suspension was replaced by Girling units the following year. This is a good, reliable conservative motorcycle. Late ones are rare and very good, with alternator electrics and excellent duplex frames. Early jampot models can have odd handling and poor brakes.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4000

Model 30 (Matchless G11)

593cc (72 x 72.8mm) ohv twin || 410lb || 60mpg || 90mph || 1956-58

AS NORTON (UNDER AMC ownership) took their 500cc Dominator 88 and stretched it into the 600cc Dominator 99, so AMC stretched their own 500 twin, simply over-boring it a little to provide the extra capacity. This is the least common of the AMC twins, and the 600s have been described as the best model in the series. The sports (CS) version is very unusual, very handsome and will cost an easy £1000 more than an equivalent standard roadster, and the very rare CSR version may fetch even more.

Prices:
low £2500, high £4500

Model 31 (Matchless G12)

646cc (72 x 79.3mm) ohv twin. 430lb, 55mpg, 100mph. 1959-66

THE MOST COMMON AMC twin. The earliest models were plainly a stroked stretch of the 600cc Model 30, and developed an over-exaggerated reputation for fragility. The early 650 crank was supposed to be delicate, but only the alternator versions, which carried the massive alternator rotor on a drive-side crankshaft extension, had problems. AMC responded by forging post-1960 cranks in a very tough nodular iron. The post '61 models are very sound, if slightly staid, machines. In common with the rest of the heavyweight range, they acquired Norton forks and wheels for 1964, along with 12V electrics. Again, genuine CS and CSR versions will hold 25% higher prices, but watch out for fakes.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4750

Matchless G15/45

749cc ohv twin || 430lb || 50mpg, 105mph || 1963

CONSCIOUS OF THE ever-growing demand – particularly in America – for more power, AMC stretched their engine out to 750cc and offered the Matchless G15/45 (there was no AJS equivalent) for sale in the US. It was strangely unsuccessful. Myth suggests that the engine was unreliable, vibratory and not very good, but repatriated bikes are very pleasant, beefy torque-deliverers, and sound in wind and limb. The idea of a 750 twin was resurrected in 1963-4, but the new model used the Norton Atlas engine to power a range of models collectively known as 'AMC hybrids'.

Prices:
low £6500 || high £9000, if you can find one

Model 33 (Matchless G15)

745cc (73 x 89mm) ohv twin || 420lb || 45mpg || 110mph || 1964-68

FOLLOWING THE SALES failure of the G15/45, AMC dropped the donkey from their Norton Atlas 750 twin into an AJS / Matchless chassis to create the Matchless 750 twin. The result is a terrific motorcycle, far more rewarding to ride than the sum of its parts suggests it should be. The legendary Atlas shakes are much reduced in the hybrids, perhaps because the heavy lugged AMC frame absorbs more energy than the welded Norton featherbed. The 750 hybrids came in three forms, a 'Mk2' UK-style trad roadster, a 'CS' street scrambler version, and a 'CSR' café racer. Confusingly, the CS and CSR versions can be very similar, especially US-spec models. The AJS versions are very rare and therefore expensive.

The final hybrids used the same engine squeezed into the cycle parts of the Matchless G85CS scrambler, replacing that machine's ohv alloy 500 single, to produce the P11, P11A and Ranger 750, often badged as Nortons. These machines are addictive, rare, and highly sought-after and highly priced!

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

ARIEL

Ariel, who built their range of high quality machines in Selly Oak, Birmingham, were a part of the BSA group of companies, and the BSA influence became greater as the years rolled by. Their machines always had a carefully-crafted air of quality, with thoughtful styling and finish. The singles were conventional in design, strong and reliable performers with a solid competition heritage to complement their build quality. There are two twins; the 500, which is an Ariel design, and the 650 which is a lightly redesigned BSA A10. All Ariel machines used Burman gearboxes despite the increasing use of BSA Group components in other areas, and they have a gloriously pre-war primary chaincase design, complete with a dry clutch running in its own external housing. Gear changes are typically Burman; slow but sure and silent if adjusted properly. The famous fours, with their cylinders arranged in a square and running two crankshafts, are some sort of pinnacle of British engineering, although they can be expensive to restore. The final flourish was the introduction of the Leader/Arrow range of 2-stroke twins, and when these were discontinued in '65, Ariel were no more. We will ignore the Ariel 3... Spares OK (one good specialist dealer, and the entirely excellent Owners' Club), apart from tinware.

In common with most other major manufacturers, Ariel entered the post-war world with a range of mostly rigid machines, but were a little ahead of the mainstream game in that they'd introduced their sprung frame just before WW2 on the Square Four. It was an unusual design, more clever than most. After the war, they offered rigid and springer frames, finally introducing their own excellent swinging arm frame in 1954.

Colt

197cc ohv single || 270lb || 80mpg || 65mph || 1954-60

A SMART LOOKING utility single loosely based on BSA's C11 with added Arielness. A faintly unusual idea, as 250cc was a more popular capacity both for commuters and learner riders. Spares good for the engines; Ariel-specific parts less so.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £2500

Leader

247cc 2-stroke twin || 330lb || 55mpg || 70mph || 1958-65

A RADICAL CONCEPT; a wholly enclosed, fully-faired touring motorcycle, with a range of accessories that almost defied description in the '50s. One of the few wholly original designs to emerge from the post-war British industry. Especially recommended to those who still enjoy leisurely lane cruising. The fairing is excellently effective, and the only real downside is the poor braking. Check that the pressed-steel beam frame is not rotted, especially around the suspension pick-up points. Comfortable and clean.

Prices:
low £2200, high £3200

Arrow
247cc 2-stroke twin || 305lb || 55mpg || 75mph || 1960-5

A STRIPPED-DOWN LEADER, built to utilise spare capacity in the Ariel works, the odd-looking Arrow was smooth and fast by the standards of the time, although it was also smoky and underbraked. Also built as the Sports (or 'Golden') Arrow (20hp, 80mph) and finally as the 200 Arrow.

Prices:
low £2200 || high £3250

NH (Red Hunter)
347cc ohv single || 365lb || 70mpg || 75mph || 1945-58

A HANDSOME WORKING single in the trad Brit mould. Few special virtues or vices. The unusual Anstey-link plunger models are unusual and interesting; the excellent swinging arm frame handles rather better. The single engines are all developments of a pre-war design, and their ancestry is plain to anyone who observes that their single oil pump is almost identical to that fitted to countless Triumph twins.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3000

VH (Red Hunter)
497cc ohv single || 375lb || 55mpg || 85mph || 1945-58

A VERY SOUND big banger, often with a beautiful maroon finish (like the rest of the 4-stroke range) and great reliability. Rigid models are always great to ride, though some consider the later swinging arm machines to be the best riders and the most oil-tight. HS (scrambles) and HT (trials) comp versions are very highly sought after and highly priced as a result. Ariel's singles are still under-rated, too, and are more affordable than many others, despite their excellence on the road.

Prices:
low £2800, high £4000

VB
598cc sv single. 370lb, 50mpg, 60mph. 1945-58

ONE OF THE last of the sidevalve sloggers (along with BSA's M20 and M21); great reliability, massive charm and almost no performance. Like a lot of sidevalves, they offer an alternative experience to more common ohv singles. If you have a choice, go for the rigid, which boasts considerable character, the swinging arm model rather less so.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4250

KH (Fieldmaster)
498cc ohv twin || 390lb || 65mpg || 90mph || 1948-58

SWEET TOURING TWIN with a unique motor in standard Ariel cycle parts. Engine spares can be hard to find, and the bikes are quite a rare sight these days. The engine is unique to the model, and is unusual in having its pushrods at the outside corners of the block. The 1953-only all alloy KHA is the most rare and will cost more. Available with rigid, Anstey link plunger or swinging arm frames. The all-iron rigid twin is a particular charmer, not unlike Norton's iron twins in the way it rides.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4250

FH (Huntmaster)
648cc ohv twin || 400lb || 55mpg || 100mph || 1954-58

SOLID TOURING 650 twin, with a BSA A10-based engine that retained the tractable, quiet iron cylinder head to its end. Probably the most usable Ariel twin because of the easy availability of engine spares, and upgradeable using any sporting BSA A10 components. A stylish but slightly more expensive alternative to an A10, entirely capable of long-distance two-up travel. However, like other Ariels, the tin bits are scarce. The brakes can be marginal, although they were deemed sufficient for sidecar use in their day.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

SOLD AS SEEN

BSA B50T, 1972. 500cc. Very original unrestored bike, runs and rides very well, very little use from new. 2500 miles, still on its original Dunlop Trials Universal tyres. Matching numbers. Tank dent free. Original decals, clips, paint, etc, chrome work generally very good. Definitely too nice to restore! SOLD FOR £5350

Square Four
997cc ohv four || 480lb || 45mpg || 100mph

THE FAMOUS BRITISH post-war four is a machine of immense appeal, considerable mechanical noise and great smoothness. Early models are supposedly prone to overheating, and the solo handling can be a little exciting at speed, not least because Ariel never put their swinging arm Four into production and the Anstey link plunger rear end can struggle with the weight and performance. The brakes can also struggle to cope with the speed and mass. For all that, the Squariel is a highly desirable and functional bike with a unique cachet.

Prices:
low £10000 || high £16000

BSA

At one time BSA were the largest motorcycle manufacturer in the world, and there are still fleets of the products of their Small Heath, Birmingham factory about. The BSA range was huge, covering all areas of road riding and competition, and was exported to just about everywhere. Many originally exported BSAs have been repatriated over the years, which keeps prices competitive. If you are a newcomer to the old bike world, then a BSA of some description could well be your best bet; they're significantly less expensive than equivalent Triumph and Norton models. Active Owners Club, many spares suppliers with plenty of repro parts being made. BSA offered a wide range of machines; singles, twins and triples, as well as the once ubiquitous Bantam, probably the most famous small stroker of them all and an inexpensive way to play with straightforward mechanicals.

The BSA way was a path of steady development, and although they built models which were as rapid as any Triumph and handled as well as Nortons, Beezers were never rated so highly. BSA – a big concern which included Triumph – left the 1960s on top of the world, and entered the 1970s on a rapid slide to oblivion. Their dohc 350 twin was stillborn, and the radical new frame designs introduced in 1971 were largely ignored because they used the same old single and twin engines. Be careful when buying bikes from 1971-73; threadforms changed in a strange sequence, so parts which appear perfect for a particular bike might not fit at all. For example; all the unit single engines look similar, which

they are, but they are not the same; they changed constantly and sometimes radically through the years. The failure and collapse of BSA is one of the saddest episodes in British industry. Always join the owners' club.

Bantam
174cc 2-stroke single || 230lb || 85mpg || 65mph || 1948-71

THE MOST WIDELY-SOLD of all BSAs, the Bantam (which was the one true learner bike of its day) is apparently immortal, being plentiful even today and having an excellent owners' club of its own. It began life in 1948 as the 123cc D1, grew to 148cc as the D3 in 1954 and to 174cc as the D5 in 1958. The one to look for is possibly the 1968-71 D14/4, which has four gears, smartish styling, good handling and general reliability. The ones to ignore are possibly the plunger-framed versions. All Bantams can be reliable and very economical to run provided that they are built properly. Spares are plentiful and cheap, and modern ignition systems and engine seals can transform them. An easy introduction to classic Brits, if not exactly exhilarating to ride.

Prices:
low £1000 || high £2000

C10 (45-57), C11 (45-55), C12 (56-58)
249cc singles || 320lb || 75mpg || 55-65mph

POST-WAR UTILITY BIKES, negligible go, stop and handling. Many consider them to be dull, although they provided stolid ride-to-work reliability for many thousands who could afford better than a bicycle. Some spares are hard to find, now, and BSA built these bikes to a price affordable by working class heroes of their day. Less sought-after than Bantams, which is a little mysterious.

Prices:
low £1200 || high £2000

C15 Star
249cc ohv single || 320lb || 70mpg || 70mph || 1959-67

REDESIGNED BASIC 250, with neat but restrained streamlined styling and unit construction. Some suffered bottom end and ignition troubles; most just whined on and on, as the basic design was rugged enough. Massive numbers were sold, which meant that even in the 'classic' age they were so plentiful that they were often neglected. Buy with care, 1970s learner riders did terrible things to them. Sports version was the SS80, which was quicker and less reliable. C15T and C15S will cost more. Before paying a lot more for a T or an S, make sure they're genuine.

Prices:
low £1250 || high £2250

SOLD AS SEEN

NORTON COMMANDO MKIII, 1976 850cc. Electric start restoration project. Two registered keepers. Engine turns nicely, good compression, no mechanical noise. Gearbox selects all gears. V5, matching numbers. Tank, side panels are genuine steel items. Tank is good inside. The front frame downtube (right side) is kinked slightly. SOLD FOR £5050

C25 Barracuda
249cc ohv single || 330lb || 60mpg || 75mph || 1966-70

RESTYLED C15 WITH a bit more go at the expense of some reliability. Better suspension, lighting and braking were added, and they can be surprisingly charming – and quick-steering, as the later frames were increasingly based around those used on the off-road comp models. Became the B25 Starfire in '68. This is a better bet as it is more reliable and less vibratory following a mild de-tuning. Also sold as the Fleetstar for fleet users.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £2500

B25SS
249cc ohv single || 320lb || 55mpg || 80mph || 1971-72

THE LAST OF the long C15-based series, with a new oil-bearing chassis and smart street scrambler clothes for BSA's final rescue attempt. Naming it the 'Gold Star 250' didn't help sales or credibility. Also called the B25 Victor and rebadged as the Triumph Trailblazer/Blazer SS. As with all 250s, these suffered from learner neglect, so buy carefully. Most spares are around, though quality can be extremely variable. The last are probably the best of all the BSA 250 singles.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £2750

B31
348cc ohv single || 365lb || 80mpg || 75mph || 1945-59

TRAD BRIT SINGLE. Often leaky and rattly but can run up very high mileages with very little maintenance. Find an early one with solid or plunger frame for greater agility and charm. They are faster and sweeter than later heavier examples. The 350 engine shared the same bicycle as far bigger machines, and can be leisurely as a result, especially the swinging arm bikes. The last models, with their coil ignition and alternator electrics, should be worthwhile contenders for anyone who wants to ride regularly.

Prices:
low £1800 || high £2800

B32 Gold Star
348cc ohv single || 360lb || 65mpg || 85mph || 1949-57

AMAZING WHAT A name and reputation can do for prices. Souped-up single with a flashy suit and better brakes than lesser models. The DB32 is the one to buy with its excellent duplex frame, although the price is high. Spares availability and quality are excellent, and owners' club support is guaranteed. Check paperwork closely: look on old documents for evidence that it has always been a Goldie and isn't an over-priced replica.

Prices:
low £6500 || high £9500

B40
343cc ohv single || 305lb || 80mpg || 75mph || 1960-65

STRETCHED C15, WITH more torque and a cast-in pushrod tunnel to distinguish it. Never wildly popular, they are nonetheless sound and usually reliable if treated kindly. Plenty of ex-WD bikes about. These are better bets, with good off-road type frames, an unusual set of gear ratios and better oil filters included. The sports SS90 version is very rare now.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2400

B44 Victor
441cc ohv single || 335lb || 65mpg || 85mph || 1966-70

ANOTHER C15 STRETCH with more go and more vibration. Engines can be fragile if abused, despite Jeff Smith scrambles heritage. Also sold as the Shooting Star, not to be confused with the twin of the same name.

Prices:
low £2250 || high £3200

B33
499cc ohv single || 420lb || 70mpg || 80mph || 1947-59

ENLARGED B31, WITH more torque so longer legs. Possibly the classic '50s workhorse, this one will run and run. Plunger suspension from 1949, then the admirable BSA swinging arm frame arrived in 1955. Alternator/coil ignition in 1958. Similar values for the M33, which is essentially an ohv (B33) engine in a sidevalve (M21) bicycle. All extremely straightforward to maintain and easy to live with: a solid bet for any beginner.

Prices:
low £2200 || high £3200

B34, DB34, DBD34, Gold Star
499cc ohv single || 410lb || 55mpg || 110mph || 1950-62

THE LEGEND ITSELF. Fun on the open road, but antisocial and awkward in traffic. Vastly overpriced due to a vast over-reputation, which masks their charm from many newer riders. Rewarding to own and to learn to ride properly. Spares and club support are excellent. Beware of fakes; buy from someone you trust, and always with a warranty. Superb specialist services and updated, uprated components are readily available, mostly intended to boost performance.

Prices:
low £12000 || high £20000

B50SS
499cc ohv single || 340lb, 60mpg || 85mph || 1971-72

THE LAST OF the C15 stretches. Striking street-scrambler style fails to disguise the overstressed power train. Also known as the B50 Gold Star and B50T Victor. Conversion to electronic ignition can transform it to one of GB's best ever singles, although starting it is a definite skill, and kickbacks can be killers. The most amazing exhaust system in the world on the US-only Triumph-badged version. Agile and quick, regular oil changes and a fully-charged battery are essential.

Prices:
low £2700 || high £4000

M20
496cc sv single || 425lb || 55mpg || 65mph || 1945-55

ONCE UBIQUITOUS ANTIQUATED sidevalve slogger, kept in production by WD contracts and sidecar hauliers like the AA. Little go and little stop but very rugged and oozing character. Stretched to 591cc in 1946 (as the M21, until 1963), with similar performance but greater thirst for both petrol and oil.

Prices:
low £2200 || high £3500. Military models £5000+

A7
497cc ohv twin || 420lb || 55mpg || 90mph || 1946-61

SPLENDID TWIN, WITH smooth power and typically fine BSA steering. Early models may be more sought after, but post-1950 bikes, with A10-based engines are better for spares. Immense reliability and charm. Recommended to anyone who enjoys motorcycling off the M-ways. Started out as a rigid, gained a redesigned engine and a plunger frame, was later redesigned again to fit into the swinging arm frame. Iron-engined rigids are especially fine. Only fault is the dismal 6V lighting but that's hardly unique to BSA and is fixable with modern components, as is the magneto ignition. A7SS Shooting Star is the sporty one with similar go and a higher price.

Prices:
low £2400 || high £3750

A50 Royal Star
499cc ohv twin || 420lb || 60mpg || 90mph || 1962-66

UNIT-CONSTRUCTION REPLACEMENT FOR the A7. A fine if slightly sluggish machine with all the style of the 650s but with less go and less vibes. Smoother, though, and the rare sporting versions are highly entertaining. Bargains can be found and they make good working bikes. 12V alternator electrics and seriously simple maintenance make then entirely practical riding machines. The engines shouldn't leak and they shouldn't rattle, but they often do…

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3750

A10
646cc ohv twin || 440lb || 55mpg || 105mph || 1951-63

A CLASSIC IN more than just name, the A10 was sold as the Golden Flash with flash style, the Road Rocket with a bit more go, and as the Super Rocket with a little more than that. Many plunger Flashes spent their working lives hauling sidecars and may still lean in that direction. The A10 engine in BSA's swinging arm frame is arguably one of the best postwar Britbikes: robust and easy to ride a long way, if less rapid than the Triumph alternative. The Rocket Gold Star was a super-sports version with Gold Star cycle parts and tuned engine. These can fetch £20,000 but are highly fakeable, so be very careful. An A10 is a fine motorcycle; the only worry can be high-speed braking on the later models. SRM main bearing conversion is a plus when looking to buy.

Prices:
low £2400 || high £4500. RGS low £7500 || high £15000

A65
654cc ohv twin || 425lb || 55mpg || 120mph || 1962-73

THE UNIT-CONSTRUCTION REPLACEMENT for the A10. The A65 has a poor reputation as a vibrator and a leaker of oil, which means that they make good buys for riders. Get one while you can! In fact, the single-carb twins are no more rough than any others. Spares are plentiful, if of unusually variable quality. Late (post '71) bikes have the same oil-bearing frames as 71-83 Triumph twins and which provide fine steering. Very late (1972) bikes are very good indeed, and are hard to fault as practical bikes – they even stopped leaking after the '71 redesign. Sold as the Thunderbolt (tourer), Lightning (sports), Spitfire (café racer) and Firebird Scrambler (street scrambler). Problems tend to be electrical and easily fixed. Specialist engineering sorts suspect bottom end oiling, as in all BSA twins.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4500

A70 Lightning
751cc ohv twin || 425lb || 50mpg || 120mph || 1971

US-ONLY HOMOLOGATION SPECIAL, intended for Stateside racing. Very rare – beware the imitator! These unusual engines were once popular with heroic chair racers. Spares are hard to find, and they're no faster on the road than the 650.

Prices:
High–if you find one.

A75R Rocket 3
740cc ohv triple || 520lb || 35mpg || 125mph ||1968-72

ARGUABLY THE FIRST superbike, the Rocket 3 was quite a sensation when launched, with its vivid acceleration, unconventional styling, high top speed and excellent steering. The bikes are in great demand, and can be expensive to run, although parts supply is good from several expert and specialist suppliers. Rewarding to own and ride, and can accept the disc brake and electric starter from the T160 Trident. Fascinating machines. They share an excellent owners' club with Triumph's Tridents.

Prices:
low £6500 || high £11,000

DOUGLAS

The small Bristol manufacturer which always seemed to be in financial difficulty, but which produced some interesting boxer twins with variable production quality. Despite the BMW-like across the frame flat twin design, with the crank's axis in line with the frame's centreline, Douglas turned the drive through 90-degrees and

used a chain final drive rather than a shaft – unlike Velocette's flat twins. Their bikes are relatively rarely offered for sale outside of the owners' club which is the only reliable source of spares.

Mark Series

348cc ohv flat twin || 340lb || 65mpg || 75mph

HARD TO FIND for sale, even harder to find on the road. Fine handling for their day, but a little fragile in the power dept. Once called 'the Bugatti of motorcycles'. The engineering is innovative, with their own take on suspension at both ends, including a truly unusual reliance upon torsion bars. The engines are sweet, smooth and gentle. Avoid the initial (teething troubled) T35 model. The Mk3 Sports is the acknowledged one to have; 80-Plus and 90-Plus sporting versions are faster and boast better brakes for a frighteningly high price.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5500

Dragonfly

348cc ohv flat twin || 395lb || 55mpg || 75mph || 1954-57

ODDLY STYLED TOURING 350 twin, featuring Earles forks and a faired headlamp / petrol tank, as well as conventional rear suspension. An involving, unusual machine with a rev-happy engine providing almost adequate performance and with excellent steering, but dire brakes and limited specialist support.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

FRANCIS-BARNETT

Part of the AMC group, F-B built sturdy and plodding 2-strokes using both the Piatti-designed AMC engine and the better Villiers unit in a variety of capacities and styles. Not at present very highly-regarded by the classic crowd, F-Bs are cheap enough to provide a lot of fun in the old bike milieu, and are reliable if looked after. Models to look out for include the amazingly styled Fulmar, which has a small AMC engine to propel its unusual frame, leading link front forks and swoopy bodywork slowly along, and the Cruiser twins (89 and 91), which have almost acceptable performance. Prices for the whole range are similar and low. Owners Clubs (their own, as well as the British Two-Stroke); scarce spares, apart from for the Villiers engines.

Prices:
low £850 || high £1850

GREEVES

Built in Thundersley, Essex, the Greeves range of lightweight, competition-based machines were always a bit different from the more mundane commuter bikes with which they shared the use of Villiers engines. The most striking features are the alloy beam-based frame and leading-link forks which used rubber in torsion as the spring medium. Any bike which could be described as 'off-road' will command a higher price, but the roadster models, using both Villiers singles and twin engines, can provide superb steering, some style and a little performance. Silverstone road-racers are highly coveted by both collectors and riders, while the less than subtle East Coaster is the Ed's personal favourite.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3250

HESKETH

Launched at a wondering world as yet another Great British world-beater, Lord Hesketh's monster V-twin turned out to be an expensive flop, largely because the splendid-looking power unit was inadequately developed and lacked the sophistication required by those spending around £6000 on a motorcycle. It was also panned by the Press, although at least one of CBG's team likes them. Production of a sort dribbled on for years, including a suggested re-launch using more modern suspension and brakes as well as a bigger version of the original engine. There are still a few low mileage examples about which could make sense, especially if they have been up-dated with the EN10 kit of improved engine parts. Spares supply mostly excellent. The current Hesketh concern is intent upon launching a new range of V-twins using a proprietary powerplant rather than their own.

V1000

992cc dohc V-twin || 560lb || 35mpg || 120mph || 1982-84

ALSO SOLD AS the Vampire with a striking full enclosure, the unfaired V1000 is let down by a noisy engine, a stiff gearchange and a very tall riding position. The rest of the machine is pretty good, using the best parts from European suppliers of the day, and most of the faults can be eliminated with redesigned parts developed by Mick Broom. Many of the criticisms come from those who've never ridden one, and those who ride them usually like them.

Prices:
low £10000 || high £14000

JAMES

The other AMC 2-stroke builder, probably most well-known for their Cadet and Captain commuters, which were very dull indeed. Once again, the better buys are those which are powered by Villiers rather than Piatti-designed AMC engines, and the very late (1966) Superswift twin is probably the one to find. Some machines were built with the Villiers 4T unit, which is a little less slow. The James Scooter (which was sold as the Matchless Papoose in the US!) is the one to avoid – unless you truly are a collector of lost causes. However, a lot of low-cost, high-amusement riding can be had from any of the James range, and they can't depreciate much. Like most British 2-strokers, they have a dedicated band of expert fans.

Prices:
low £850 || high £1500

MATCHLESS

The once-famous marque was offered a new lease of life from a new home in Newton Abbot in Devon. Only one model was offered; a Rotax-engined 500cc single, either with or without electric start, and with a second front brake disc to handle the power of the electric start (a joke). The frame, designed by Triumph engineer Brian Jones, is oil-bearing, light and neat. Many spares are available from either the company (LF Harris) or from Rotax. The G80 suffered from over-pricing, sadly, and didn't sell well.

G80

499cc ohc single || 390lb || 55mpg || 95mph || 1987-90

EARLY STARTING AND finish problems would appear to have been overcome on the later bikes, and the G80 makes a pleasant, practical, comfortable classic styled bike for everyday use. If you have a choice, opt for the electric start and twin front discs and accept that you'll pay more for one of those.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £4000

NORTON

An AMC company from 1953, Norton moved from their Birmingham base to the London AMC works in 1963 as part of the parent company's struggle to stay afloat. They built a wide range of machines including sidevalve sloggers, ohc singles and ohv twins. Famously better roadholding than the Triumph competition although many riders prefer the Triumph's perky power delivery: always more expensive than BSA, AJS or Matchless equivalents. Following the AMC crash of '66, the new Norton Villiers concern concentrated on twins, launching the Commando in 1967 and relying on variants on this theme until production ceased in 1977. A revived successor company produced several hundred twin-rotor Wankel engined machines between 1983 and 1992, which have become accepted as classics despite their strangeness. The modern range of 961 Commandos is still current, so not considered here, yet. Spares supply is excellent for the classic twins, reasonable for the singles; likewise for the rotaries despite the demise of the factory. An excellent owners' club, who supply an increasing range of obscure spares.

Jubilee

249cc ohv twin || 350lb || 75mpg || 65mph || 1958-66

WELL-DESIGNED BUT UNDERDEVELOPED and sometimes poorly assembled unit construction twin engine in AMC group lightweight chassis. Suffered from oil leaks, mechanical disasters and the Wipac electrical bits. Deluxe version looks smart if you like skirts. The James-style forks and wheels deny cred from an otherwise interesting machine. The unit construction lightweight twin engine is in intriguing design; easy to work on, and should be robust, with its huge main and big end bearings. Oddly, its reputation is less than that.

Prices:
low £1700 || high £2300

Navigator

349cc ohv twin || 350lb || 65mpg || 75mph || 1960-65

ENLARGED AND MORE useful Jubilee with Roadholder forks and an 8" front brake. Enough performance for cruising the byways and excellent handling. Expensive (for a lightweight) but wieldy and manageable. Handsome too, in a baby-Dommi way, and quick enough, if not fast.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3250

Electra

394cc ohv twin || 360lb || 55mpg || 75mph || 1963-65

RARE ELECTRIC START version of the Navigator with a few more ccs and indicators. The best of the lightweights and pretty civilised for 1963. Provided the electrical system's in decent condition, the starter is reliable enough too. Light and agile, with great steering and stopping. It even has indicators.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4500

Model 50

348cc ohv single || 400lb || 75mpg || 75mph || 1956-63

GENTLE TRAD BRIT single with nice manners and gentle performance. Post '59 models are the most expensive, with the famous featherbed frame, decent lights and good looks, but the earlier non-featherbed machines are charming, much cheaper and have a better riding position. Very few featherbed M50s survive, most were turned into Tritons...

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4500

Model 40

349c ohc single || 340lb || 65mpg || 85mph || 1946-58

TRIUMPH T160 TRIDENT. Matching numbers and V5. Standard compression. £4000 spent on parts. New NVT Smiths clocks, new fork stanchions, rear shocks, wiring harness, T160 headlight, indicators, handlebar switches, stainless front brake lever and master cylinder and masses more... SOLD FOR £5750

FUSSY CAMSHAFT SINGLE, aka the International, a distant roadgoing relative of the racing Manx models. Featherbed bikes are probably the best, but are ludicrously expensive. Experts are out there; identifying them is rarely easy. Parts are available, but are never wallet-friendly.

Prices:
low £20000 || high £30000

16H

490cc sv single || 365lb || 55mpg || 65mph || 1945-55

MOST UN-NORTON-LIKE SLOGGER with less performance than a modern 125. They do have much charm though, and some riders prefer them to BSA's equivalent M20, which was also a favourite with WW2 soldier DRs. Used to be found with chair attached and completely worn out, now usually observed at military revivalist meetings.

Prices:
low £2450 || high £4000 (military models more)

Model 18 / ES2

490cc ohv single || 380lb || 60mpg || 75mph || 1947-62

NORTON'S TRAD BRIT single. An average performer in all areas until the featherbed frame gave it brilliant handling for 1959. Again, it's a pleasant bike, but a lot of the featherbed ES2s were converted into Tritons. Opinion suggests that the M18 and ES2 are among the best British singles. The M18 (1945-54) is essentially the plunger ES2 less the plungers; ie. it retained the earlier rigid frame but used the Roadholder front end.

Prices:
low £3200 || high £5000

ES2 Mk2 & Model 50 Mk2. 1964-66

MATCHLESS MACHINES WITH Norton badges and bearing no resemblance to 'real' ES2s. Built for some odd marketing reason for a short time prior to the AMC collapse. Very rare now; price as AJS 350/500, plus invisible rarity factor.

Model 7

497cc ohv twin || 413lb || 60mpg || 90mpg || 1948-52

AN UNUSUAL NORTON twin, with a gentle iron-head version of the Dominator twin engine in a plunger bicycle similar to that of the ES2. Handling nowhere near featherbed class, but an interesting and comfortable machine. Debatable whether it's really worth any more than the equivalent BSA A7, but always priced higher.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

88

497cc ohv twin || 420lb || 60mpg, 90mph || 1951-66

THE FIRST FEATHERBED-FRAMED roadster twin and a

fine motorcycle. Brilliant steering, excellent brakes and smooth (if a little noisy) motor make for a good time. Frame layout can produce leg-ache after a long run. Also available as the 88SS, which had twin carbs, a siamesed exhaust and was quite quick.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

Model 30 (International)
490cc ohc single || 360lb || 60mpg || 95mph || 1946-58

CAMMY SPORTS SINGLE which offered similar performance to the 88 twin but required much more effort to achieve it. Good looks, class and oil leaks fail to justify the high prices. Kamshaft kudos is invaluable, however.

Prices:
low £14500 || high £25000

Model 19
596cc ohv single || 385lb || 60mpg || 70mph || 1955-57

MONSTER 600 SINGLE for the chair pullers with little to commend it except rarity. Suffix 'S' stands for Sprung (not Sports, silly) and 'R' for Rigid. Very long stroke engine makes it a master at climbing mountains as well as hard to start.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4000

Big 4
596cc sv single || 400lb || 50mpg || 65mph || 1947-54

PRE-WAR RELIC INTENDED to haul vast loads great distances very slowly. Overpriced by the name on the tank, but serene to ride. Some rare engine spares.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

Model 77
RARE TWIN; BASICALLY a 99 engine in a non-featherbed swinging arm bicycle very similar to the same-year ES2. Comfortable, calm bike to ride, and intended mainly for sidecar use. US riders could buy the Nomad, a desert sled version of this machine with great styling and better performance.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £4500
(Nomad a lot more)

99
596cc ohv twin || 420lb || 55mpg || 100mph || 1956-62

STRETCHED 88 WITH a little more speed and vibration. One of the best of the entire Dominator series. Shared the same cycle parts as the other featherbed twins and developed with them. Single carb, gained an alternator in 1958 and the slimmer slimline featherbed in 1959.

Prices:
low £5500 || high £7500

650SS / Mercury
646cc ohv twin || 420lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1960-69

STRETCHED 99 WITH better performance, greater vibration and the slimline featherbed chassis. Very fast but harsh with it. The final featherbed twin was the Mercury, built alongside the Commando until 1969 with a single carb, light mudguarding and no tacho. Smoother and more relaxed than the 650SS; possibly the most pleasant featherbed twin.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £6500

Atlas
745cc ohv twin || 420lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1963-68

STRETCHED 650 WITH no more go but plenty of vibes. Huge amount of torque makes for a very relaxed cruiser, but vibration spoils the thrill of the acceleration. Still a good bike, and rewarding to ride, although much overshadowed by the Commando in the classic era.

Prices:
low £5000, high £6500

N15CS
745cc ohv twin || 420lb || 45mpg || 110mph || 1964-68

NORTON ATLAS ENGINE in a Matchless chassis and off-road clothes makes for a wild early trail bike. Mainly sold in the US as 'desert sleds'. Loads of noise, vibes, excitement. Strangely, the Atlas engine shakes rather less in the Matchless's lugged frame than in Norton's all-welded featherbed.

Prices:
low £5500 || high £7500

P11/P11A/ Ranger 750
745cc ohv twin || 400lb || 45mpg || 110mph || 1965-69

DEFINITIVE US DESERT racer, with the Atlas lump in Matchless G85CS scrambler cycle parts making a beast of a bike. Very rare and very fine street scrambler.

Prices:
low £7000 || high £9000

Commando
745cc ohv twin || 450lb || 55mpg || 125mph || 1968-73

828cc ohv twin || 450lb || 50mpg || 120mph || 1973-77

THE LAST STRETCH of the Dominator engine. The increasing vibration was tamed by the Isolastic rubber frame mounts, at the expense of some steering precision. Early versions used what was basically an Atlas engine; the 850 was much more refined, less prone to oil loss and less rapid. Sold as Fastback (with unusual styling), Fastback LR (bigger tank), Roadster (small tank), 'S' (high pipes and small tank), HiRider (bizarre custom thing), Interstate (vast tanked tourer), John Player Special (fake racer) and as a real proddie racer. 1975 brought us the Mk3, complete with a single disc brake at each end and an electric start. This was the butt of much humour at the time, but modern replacement starter motors cure it. Possibly the best Brit twin, certainly a genuine British superbike, with all the charm of the big engine without the vibration. Spares supply is excellent: endless opportunities to upgrade engine and ancillaries. Superb owners' club.

Prices:
low £4500 || high £8500

Classic
588cc twin rotary || 498lb || 40mpg || 110mph || 1988-89

THE FIRST CIVILIAN rotary Norton. Neat traditional style and unique performance. One hundred and one built and sold. Check that it really is a Classic and not a re-upholstered police Interpol 2.

Prices:
low £7000 || high £11000

Interpol 2
588cc twin rotary || 498lb || 40mpg || 110mph || 1983-88

THE MOST COMMON of the rotary series. Built for police and fleet use, the spine frame and ultra-smooth rotary engine, allied to a BMW RT-style fairing, fully enclosed drive chain and hard Craven-type panniers produced an excellent touring machine. All rotaries depend on informed maintenance. Modern ignition systems and lubricants liberate them from their early unreliability. Marzocchi forks and Brembo brakes add to the riding pleasure. Buy with care, or budget for a specialist rebuild before use.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £5500

Commander
588cc I/c twin rotary || 498lb || 40mpg || 110mph || 1988-93

NORTON REPLACED THE air-cooled Interpol 2 with the more refined liquid-cooled Commander. Built in parallel for fleet / police use and the civilian market, it replaced the Italian components of the IP2 with running gear from Yamaha's XJ900. Excellent fairing, and twin batteries to provide confidence for private users as well as major electricals for the police. Early machines offered only non-removable hard panniers, while the last ones were fitted with detachable Krauser items. Buy with care; rotary engines respond badly to neglect but are fast and reliable when properly set up.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

F1
588cc twin rotary || 162kg || 32mpg || 135mph || 1990-92

IF YOU WANT to preserve for posterity, buy an original F1, if you want to ride a bike, buy the later F1 Sport. Water-cooled rotormotor with Yamaha gearbox in exotic alloy beam chassis and staggering styling. Overheated in traffic, but brilliant to ride. Superb handling and considerable rapidity. Buy a bike only with a known history and preferably a service record.

Prices:
low £14000 || high £18000

PANTHER
BUILT BY PHELON and Moore in Cleckheaton, Yorkshire, Panther motorcycles inspire huge loyalty in their owners and seem to spur them on to incredible feats. As well as the galaxy-spanning big slopers, P&M built a range of lighter 4-stroke singles and a range of 2-stroke lightweights powered by the ubiquitous Villiers engines and featuring Earles forks. They also imported the Terrot scooter in a vain tilt at the scooter market. Panthers have little performance but great charm. Active and completely eccentric Owners Club. Spares OK.

Models 65/75
248/348cc ohv singles || 340/350lb || 75/65mpg || 63/72mph || 1947-62

A PAIR OF very traditional British singles with a pedigree dating back to Boadicea at least. Rugged, simple, immortal and distinctly non-sporting, they were equipped with about the best tele-forks to have been made in Britain; Dowty's 'Oleomatic' (pump-up, air-sprung) units. Worth a ride for these alone.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2500

Model 100
598cc ohv single || 440lb || 60mpg || 75mph || 1946-63

INTENDED AS A chairpuller, and looking quite odd without one, they have immense reliability, leak hugely and run on for years. Built for durability rather than looks. Supremely charming to own. One of Brit biking's great characters.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £5000

Model 120
646cc ohv single || 440lb || 55mpg || 80mph || 1959-65

ENLARGED BUT LITTLE different. 'Notably more troubled than the Model 100' said noted historian Steve Wilson. Some spares are very rare, but the owners' club can usually help.

Prices:
low £2800 || high £4000

ROYAL ENFIELD

From their Redditch works, RE built a respectable range of staid singles and twins which were at one time mostly famous for their inability to retain their oil. They listed two ranges of singles, one based on the Bullet and the other on the unit-construction Crusader. There was also a rather nice Villiers powered 250, the Turbo Twin, which is very rare. The twins came in 500, 700 and 750 capacities, arguably the best of which were the late Interceptors, which have Norton forks and front wheel and go as well as they look. All heavy models used the Albion gearbox, which was out-dated by 1956 and can be slow through the gears with an odd neutral-finder lever to play with. Spares for most models are very good, with much interchange between Brit-built Bullets and their Indian descendants.

Clipper
248cc ohv single || 350lb || 85mpg || 60mph || 1953-57

GENTLE AND RARE. Even rose-tinted retro-vision doesn't help much with the performance.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2200

Crusader
248cc ohv single || 330lb || 75mpg || 75mph || 1956-66

UNIT CONSTRUCTION SINGLE with good handling and oil leaks. Also offered with a 5-speed gearbox (the Super 5) which had something of a reputation for unreliability.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2500

Continental
248cc ohv single || 320lb || 65mpg || 80mph || 1962-67

RESTYLED VERSION OF the 5-speed Crusader, with more waft, vibration and oil leaks. Odd semi-racer styling on the GT model.

Prices:
low £2200 || high, £3000

Bullet
346cc ohv single || 365lb || 70mpg || 70mph || 1949-63

ENFIELD'S RATHER UNDER-RATED version of the trad Brit single, distinguished by intriguing detail design. Less common 500 version with more torque is perhaps a better machine, but both steer extremely well. British-built Bullets much more valued than Indian ones.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £4000

Meteor Minor
496cc ohv twin || 420lb || 60mpg || 85mph || 1959-63

DEVELOPED FROM THE rare '500 Twin', the small RE twin is a much under-rated machine which goes and handles very well, although some spares can be elusive.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £3200

Bullet / Electra / Continental
499cc ohv single || 390lb || 80mpg || 80mph || 1955-present

PRODUCTION OF BULLETS continued in Chennai, India, long after it ended in Blighty. Quality dubious until mid-1990s, incremental improvements since then. Official UK bikes always built to a better standard than grey imports. Electra-X came with lean-burn engine and five-speed gearbox. Fuel-injection and unit construction from 2007. Latest version boosted to 535cc for café racer Continental GT model. Heaps of choice, great value, excellent spares supply and enthusiast suppliers.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £3000

Super Meteor
692cc ohv twin || 430lb || 55mpg || 100mph || 1952-60

ANOTHER UNDER-RATED TWIN, with good manners and excellent rideability. Very good tourer. Developed into the Constellation for 1959, with better styling, better handling, less reliability and 110mph. Try one and be (pleasantly) surprised.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £3500

Constellation/ Interceptor Mk 1
692/736cc ohv twin || 435lb || 110mph || 1958-68

A RACE-BRED SPORTS development of the Super Meteor. Very fast but earned a deserved reputation for fragility and external lubrication. The later and larger Interceptor Mk 1 was a little better.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

Interceptor Mk2
736cc ohv twin || 442lb || 112mph || 1968-70

A SERIOUS CONTENDER for Britain's best-ever big (parallel) twin. A super redesign of the old engine lifted it into the near-bulletproof bracket. Crushingly handsome good looks, good handling and an

immense power spread, no oil leaks. Norton forks and front brake are very effective, and the only let-down is the gearbox, which has a chasm between 3rd and top. The Rickman-framed offspring is sheer magic, but it was all too late to stop RE from going under.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £7500

SCOTT

Made post-war in Birmingham by the Aerco Jig and Tool Company, who took over production from the Shipley factory and compromised the long-established specification with sophistication that just seemed to add weight. An intriguing mix of old and almost modern with sweet manners if you're not in a great hurry. Always remember that all Scott engines are 2-stroke twins and are not like any other engine you'll have encountered before. Only ever buy one from someone you trust and who knows what they're selling. Fascinating machines, with ingenious solutions to problems you didn't know existed.

Squirrel
596cc 2-str. twin || 400lb || 50mpg || 80mph || 1947-mid 60s

QUIRKY, TORQUEY, AND for the individualist only. Unique. Absorbing to own and rewarding to ride.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

SUNBEAM

THE SUNBEAM NAME was acquired by BSA (from AMC) during WW2 and was relaunched in '46 as an upmarket tourer. Sadly, the S7/S8 series machines were never fully developed and sales were disappointing. Most wearing spares available from one major and expert source. Clever engineering, well made and a true alternative to all other British 500cc parallel twins.

S7/S8
490cc ohc in-line twin || 490lb || 55mpg || 80mph || 1946-57

INTENDED AS THE ideal touring motorcycle, with a rubber mounted, unit construction, understressed power unit, driving via a shaft. Comfortable and handsome but the S7 was let down by sluggish performance and ponderous handling. The S8 looked slimmer, with its BSA front forks and brake, and steered a little better. Something of an heroic failure. Always worth consideration if style is more important than speed.

Prices:
low £3600 || high £5000

TRIUMPH

These chaps started the British obsession with parallel twins just before the 1939-45 war and kept them in production until 1988 (latterly at the LF Harris works in Devon), before John Bloor began again at Hinckley. The excellent availability of spares for most of the post-war models makes them very popular with riders in the classic world, and they are indeed very practical and plentiful bikes. Huge numbers of US-spec Bonnies and Tridents have come back from the States, along with quantities of NOS spares. Triumphs are often mechanically noisy, and with less than perfect steering on the '50s and early-'60s twins. Triumph also built some oddly pleasant scooters – they're really alternative! Spares supply is ample (but quality variable); the owners' club is active and enthusiastic, and both twins and triples have benefitted greatly from modern re-engineered components. If you absolutely must have a Triumph then you'll happily pay the price premium which the badge commands: but if you started here simply because it's a familiar name then go look at BSAs for a softer entry to classic Brits. Early Hinckley Triumphs have achieved 'classic' status already: look out for them in a future issue.

Tiger Cub
199cc ohv single || 230lb || 85mpg || 65mph

DEVELOPED FROM THE earlier 150cc Terrier, the Tiger Cub was a great learner bike of its day. Sold in off-road form as well as roadster, many have also been converted for use in pre-65 trials. Some suffered from weird wiring and weak brakes and big end. The late ones are best, with the BSA Bantam rolling chassis. Massively popular, and priced way beyond their performance.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £4500

TR25, Blazer SS
249cc ohv single || 320lb || 55mpg || 80mph || 1971-72

A NEAT STREET scrambler based around the BSA B25, which is identical bar the styling and badges. Don't be put off by their poor reputation; used sensibly, with frequent oil changes, they can be fun and practical to ride. Triumphs appear to fetch higher prices than BSA, oddly. The oil-bearing frame is excellent; two different front brakes were used, both can be made to work well. Earlier TR25W Trophy is as uninspired as the BSA Starfire, which it really is.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2500

3TA
348cc ohv twin || 360lb || 70mpg || 80mph || 1957-68

ALSO CALLED THE 21 (21 cu in = 350cc), this was the first unit-construction Triumph. Bizarre 'bathtub' rear end styling makes them stand out; odd handling, feeble brakes and sporadic sparks make you wonder why they sold so well. Sporty version was the Tiger 90, which was nicer and lasted a year longer.

Prices:
low £2750 || high £3650

5T Speed Twin
498cc ohv twin || 375lb || 65mpg || 90mph || 1946-57

EARLY POST-WAR MODELS have weak forks and brakes, copious leaks, rattles and poor roadholding. No wonder they sold well! Avoid anything with a sprung hub if you enjoy riding rapidly. Engine is sweet and willing, however, and just a few miles will reveal the reason for the enduring popularity of Triumph's twins. Despite their weaknesses, they are endlessly fine riding machines.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5000

Tiger 100
498cc ohv twin || 370lb || 60mpg || 100mph || 1946-57

SPORTS VERSION OF the 5T, with same comments and more performance. The all alloy engine is a rattler, but is a mover – it's a shame so many ended up in Tritons and Tribsas. Riding an early s/arm model can be (a little too) exciting, though the TR5 off-road models are simply superb.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £7000, TR5 a lot more

5TA
498cc ohv twin || 385lb || 50mpg || 85mph || 1958-66

UNIT CONSTRUCTION REPLACEMENT for the 5T, with 'bathtub' rear enclosure, puny frame and a monster front mudguard. Crisp engine, interesting handling at speed. The engine is faster than the frame; excitement guaranteed. The T100A was the first unit Tiger 100; looked more like a motorcycle, and lasted until '61. It was followed by the T100SS (1962-65), the T100 (1966), took a great leap forward to become the T100S (1967-70) and the T100T (1967-70) with a quicker motor. This became the T100C (1971-72) and finally the T100R Daytona (1971-73). Later models are usually better. Original bathtub enclosures are now very hard to find (riders of the time did the wise thing and binned them) although remanufactured items surface every so often. Practical fun bikes.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4500

TR5T Adventurer

498cc ohv twin || 330lb || 50mpg || 80mph || 1973-74

TRIUMPH 500 UNIT twin engine in oil-bearing 250 single scrambler cycle parts. Fairly rare, under-geared but handsome, popular and frisky. One of the most peculiar exhausts ever and unique instruments!

Prices:
low £4500 || high £6000

TRW

498cc sv twin || 375lb || 65mpg, 70mph || 1948-65

QUIETLY CHARMING MILITARY machine; delightful if leisurely. Rigid rear end and sprung saddle provides 'vintage' feel, with added benefit of reasonable brakes. Many parts interchangeable with Trophy trials model, so many were converted. Many were civilianised after being demobbed; modern ironies find numerous examples now converted back to military trim.

Prices:
low £3400 || high £5000

6T Thunderbird

649cc ohv twin || 400lb || 60mpg || 95mph || 1950-61

BIG, SOFT AND smoothish tourer with customary Triumph plus and minus points. Sports version was the Tiger 110 ('54-'61), which was faster without too much vibration. The iron-head 650 with a sprung hub frame is viewed by some as the best of all Triumphs, and they are excellent riding machines.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £6200

TR6 Trophy

649cc ohv twin || 400lb || 55mpg || 105mph || 1954-73

AMERICAN-ORIGINATED SEMI OFF-ROADER which through the years evolved for the UK as a roadster replacement for the Thunderbird, with more stability and similar performance. Bonneville improvements usually ended up on the Trophies too, and many consider the single-carb engines to be sweeter than the twin-carb Bonnies. Engine prefix TR6P denotes an ex-police bike. The Thunderbird name was used for the late (1981-83) short-stroke TR65; an excellently revvy rider's machine but fairly unusual.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6200

Tiger 110

649cc ohv twin || 420lb || 60mpg, 109mph || 1953-61

SPORTING UPGRADE OF the 6T, and an entirely pleasant machine to ride, the T110 was intended to be the fast 650 demanded by the Americans, who bought boatloads of them. Eclipsed by the arrival of the T120 Bonneville in 1959, the T110 was phased out soon after. The last year, 1961, was a particularly fine machine.

Prices:
low £4500, high £5700

T120 Bonneville

649cc ohv twin || 400lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1959-62

SUPER-SPORTS PRE-UNIT 650; always a favourite among the café racers, with lots of power, noise, shakes and wild handling at speed. A cracker, but beware fake lash-ups at high prices. The Bonneville name adds a load to the price, but if you must have one…

Prices:
low £7000 || high £12000

T120 Bonneville

649cc ohv twin || 410lb || 50mpg || 115mph || 1963-74

THE UNIT BONNIE. The most famous British twin of them all; hugely well documented development history fills many books (buy one!). 1966-70 bikes fetch the highest prices and are arguably the best of a good bunch. 1971-74 oily-framed 5-speeders (T120V) are the safest, with a disc as well as the fifth gear, and they are easily the cheapest.

Prices:
low £4500 || high £12000

T150 / T160 Trident

740cc ohv triple || 503lb || 37mpg || 120mph || 1968-75

FAST AND EXCITING, with excellent steering. The disc-braked versions stop well, and the electric start T160 is a very fine all-rounder indeed. A little more money, reliability and further development could have kept it in production for several more years, and had the T180 Thunderbird III made it into production it should have sold well. Everyone should have one, at least once. Good spares supply; several specialists have continued development and improved reliability, but they still require dedicated owner input.

Prices:
low £6000 || high £9000

T140 Bonneville 750

744cc ohv twin || 440lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1973-88

A SYMBOL OF the dark days of industrial unrest at Triumph's Meriden, Coventry works, the Bonnie somehow weathered the storm and remained available. It sold on character alone, and was kept in production after the final demise of the Triumph Engineering Co by LF Harris, finally being withdrawn in '88 to make way for his new Matchless G80 model. First T140s were actually 725cc, but those are rare now. UK versions suffered from some dire styling, while the US versions always looked a lot better. Early models are usually faster, though as the years passed and development resources shrank, the big battle was to maintain compliance with US emissions standards. This effectively reduced the performance to keep down the noise. Late machines are arguably the best, with some very attractive limited edition models, and with a usually effective electric start taking the strain. The Bing carbs are less desirable, but the US market demanded them, and it's easy enough to regain that lost performance. Affordable and reliable, if not as charming as older incarnations. The first and last of the classic Brit twins?

Prices:
low £3200 || high £6000

TR7 Tiger 750

744cc ohv twin || 440lb || 60mpg || 110mph || 1973-88

SINGLE CARB VERSION of the Bonnie. Similar performance, less charisma than the T140, but in many ways a preferable machine. Smoother, usually, easier to keep in tune, and a little more frugal, not least because of the single Amal carb. Super-rare bright yellow TR7T Tiger Trail is a gem … if you can find one.

Prices:
low £3200 || high £4500 || TR7T a lot more

TR65 Thunderbird

649cc ohv twin || 185kg || 75mpg || 100mph || 1981-82

TRULY EXCELLENT SHORT-STROKE version of the oily frame Triumph twin, basically a TR7 Tiger with the stroke reduced to 71.5mm (from 82mm). Intended as an economy entry level Triumph, the originals boasted very little chrome, no tacho, a black finish to many of the engine covers, a drum rear brake and a single-sided black coated exhaust. Later machines were offered with tach and a conventional exhaust. Highly recommend. Smooth easy starters, and just about unburstable.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £4250 || TR65T very rare and expensive

TSX

A FASCINATING ATTEMPT by Meriden Triumph to produce a 'soft chopper' – a factory custom. Bonneville powerplant and main frame, but with clever styling tweaks and a fat back wheel coupled with many detail changes to produce a striking and unusual machine. Few sold, so rare and overpriced.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

TSS
744cc ohv twin || 420lb || 45mpg || 120mph || 1982-83

A BONNIE WITH an 8-valve head. A little more performance and a certain cachet, maybe, but uncertain reliability. The machine should have provided a sporting performance, and was certainly faster than a contemporary T140, but a lack of development resources denied it a decent run. Eight-valves, twin discs, an electric start and subtle styling – as well as rarity – command high prices.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

VELOCETTE

One of the most individual of English bike builders, Velocette's great post-war hope was the LE flat twin, which was expected to sell in vast numbers as a bike for everyman. It didn't, and the Hall Green factory had continual cash-flow difficulties as a result. Even so, they built some great singles until the money finally ran out in 1971. Enthusiasts provide a wide range of improvements for the Veloce original, and all the singles command higher prices than most other Brit equivalents.

LE
192cc sv l/c flat twin || 250lb || 100+mpg || 55mph || 1949-71

A TRULY HEROIC (commercial) failure. For years, British motorcyclists had cried out for a water-cooled, silent, sophisticated, shaft-driven bike with built-in legshields. But they didn't buy it, probably because it was too civilised, odd-looking or just gutless. LEs are pleasant little machines with a style of their own, a dedicated following and their own owners' club. The ohv unfaired Valiant roadster was frail but flew.

Prices:
low £1650 || high £2050

Vogue
192cc sv l/c flat twin || 330lb || 95mpg || 55mph || 1963-68

AN ATTEMPT AT updating the LE with neat glassfibre bodywork. Very attractive and practical bike, but with less performance than the Ariel Leader. Rare now.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4500

MAC
349cc ohv single || 370lb || 70mpg || 75mph || 1952-60

VELO'S OWN TRAD Brit single is a charming machine with good steering and reliability. An excellent working bike; easy-starting, smooth, nimble and comfortable. Ideal introduction to the marque.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £8000

Viper
349cc ohv single || 390lb || 60mpg || 85mph || 1956-69

SWEET 350 SPORTSTER whose roadholding outperforms the engine. Like most trad Brit heavyweight 350s, its bigger brother sold better.

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

MSS
499cc ohv single || 400lb || 60mpg || 80mph || 1953-68

GENTLE TOURING 500. The last of a breed, with good steering, comfort and reliability; plus the traditional separate gearbox, Miller electrics and strange clutch. Probably the easiest of the Velo singles to live with, boasting good main road performance, fine handling and always adequate braking.

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

Venom
499cc ohv single || 400lb || 55mpg || 95mph || 1956-68

SPORTS SINGLE IN the old tradition. Quick, precise steering and high cruising speeds make it a desirable machine. Although out-dated by the 1960s, Velo enthusiasts kept it in production after all its rivals had fallen. Venom Clubman is the most highly prized, highly priced and hard to ride.

Prices:
low £8000 || high £12500

Thruxton
499cc ohv single || 390lb || 50mpg || 105mph || 1964-71

LAST OF THE line, and priced alongside BSA Gold Stars and Inter Nortons. With which they share the market's stratosphere. Often tough to start, requiring The Knowledge to make them give their best, they are only suited to the truly committed (and wealthy).

Prices:
low £15000 || high £20000+

VINCENT

Probably the most widely discussed British marque of all time, this small builder of high-quality, expensive motorcycles soldiered on with their high performance twins until 1955, when even re-badging NSU tiddlers couldn't save them. Considering their ultra-high value, it is good to see so many on the road. Spares plentiful, if rather expensive. A superb owners' club and riding community ensures their survival and desirability.

Comet
499cc ohv single || 400lb || 60mpg || 85mph || 1948-54

HALF OF THE famous V-twin (half the size, half the appeal, less than half the price), the Comet shares most of its cycle parts with the big twins, which keeps up the cost, but has a Burman gearbox rather than Vincent's own, making it a little less charismatic in the eyes of some. Good to ride, quick and with excellent steering.

Prices:
low £15000 || high £20000

1000
998cc ohv V-twin || 460lb || 50mpg || 120mph || 1950-55

SOLD AS A tourer (Rapide), sportster (Shadow) and fully-enclosed super tourer (Black Prince), the big Vin has a fearful reputation to live up to, and largely succeeds. Genuinely capable of holding their own in the modern motorway world, the big twins attract addicts to their unique engineering and riding experience. Electric starts and other upgrades are now increasingly considered acceptable. Prices are in the stars, and show no sign of falling. Few owners are disappointed, and they can't afford to be.

Prices:
low £20000 || high £HUGE...

E&OE

There will be errors and there are certainly omissions. Correcting them is likely to be too big a task for the CBG simpletons, so your assistance will always be appreciated. If you want us to add / remove / improve an entry, drop a note to editor@classicbikeguide.com and we'll credit you for any changes which result. Similarly, if you've recently sold or bought a bike, drop us a pic of it with the price, and we'll use it when there's space … with anonymity if you prefer! CBG

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Shocking stuff

WORDS & PHOTOS: STEVE COOPER

Fancy a challenge? Have a crack at taking shock absorbers apart.

1: A pair of functioning but rather tired looking shock absorbers

2: In here is the roll pin and it's happy where it is!

IT MAY COME as a surprise to some, but the stock of Japanese New Old Stock (NOS) is drying up. Those who previously carried out the infamous chequebook restorations now have little choice but to do what many have been doing for ages… actually repair what's in front of them.

Engines and forks have long been standard fare for the home mechanic, but few are willing to even countenance the idea that shock absorbers are serviceable/rebuildable items. For many the units that prevent the rear of the motorcycle from collapsing onto the ground are afforded a mythical, godlike, status and are regarded as uncharted territory. What man can make man can repair is a reasonable maxim. However, with Japanese suspension units it's more a case of how far you can actually go given the nature of their construction, which parts might be available from specialist suppliers, how resourceful the restorer is and ultimately the workshop facilities they have access to that dictates what's possible.

Many ardent restorers are more concerned about accuracy and authenticity than they are about ultimate handling. With that in mind, what follows is a guide to how Japanese suspension units come apart, what's inside them, how to cosmetically refresh what's there and, crucially, where to stop before irreparable harm is done.

Sanity check

If your shock absorbers are leaking oil, do yourself a huge favour and purchase an aftermarket set or a better pair of used ones. The reality here is that for a shock absorber to get this bad the chances are that it will have been abused beyond reasonable reclamation. Of course there are exceptions and it may be worth further investigation, but remember that these devices are safety critical. On the assumption that what you have in front of you looks half reasonable, let's go and take it apart.

3: Hammer, punch and easing fluid release the roll pin from captivity

Strip down

There are two main types of basic construction for Japanese bikes running twin shocks: roll pin and thread retained or collet retained springs. Before stumbling in blindly it's worth stating the obvious. Shock absorbers contain a spring under compression which has an innate desire for freedom. Some will seek independence quietly and meekly, others will make a rampageous effort to be free from their bonds. Always assume it's the latter scenario so that your fingers, face and other bodily parts will be impact and bruise free. Oh, and while we're in nanny state territory, never attempt to dismantle a shock absorber that has a sticker declaring that it's pressurised with gas. That way lies madness and a trip to A&E.

Anything containing a roll pin will need TLC in disassembly. Lots of easing oil, penetrating fluid and the like need to be applied regularly over time. The roll pin is a high carbon steel device that's strong but prone to bimetallic corrosion. The bond twixt it and an alloy fitting may take some effort to break – but not brutality. Ideally roll pins are best evicted with a suitable flat faced punch or, as is the case on our units, the shank of a pop rivet. These steel rods are immensely strong and put up well with hammer blows. With their face filed flat it should be possible to use these normally thrown away shanks to evict even the most recalcitrant roll pin. On no account use a tapered punch or a soft iron nail; both will fail and possibly cause irreparable damage. When said pin is free nothing should go boing, pop or twang; the pin's purpose is simply to stop the various parts of the shock coming undone. From here the true strip down occurs.

The roll pin will have held one end of the shock's mounting eye secure on the operating or damper rod, and this now needs to be liberated from whatever it's fixed to. Almost without exception the mounting eye unscrews from the rod but double check just to be sure; if there's a strange ovoid slab behind the shock eye with two flats on it this is a locking nut and needs to be slackened off. On our example the shock eye is threaded onto the rod and butts against the lower shock cover which is also threaded. Using duct tape or rubber sheeting to protect it, the lower shroud or body is clamped in a vice and the eye unscrewed from the rod with a suitable lever. If the eye is reluctant to move, a high-tech penetrant such as ACF-50 should do the business; alternatively some carefully applied heat will help. Sometimes double nutting the shock rod and applying a spanner to the inner nut will break a corroded joint. From here everything unscrews or lifts off in sequence – but a quick heads up; take good clear images of the order in which the components come off or apart.

4: Tommy bar should unscrew the shock eye

5: The rod will hopefully turn through the base

6: Soaked and left to do its stuff

7: Controlled heating should loosen the fitting

8: Little defeats double nutting

9: Tidying up the thread may make life easier

10: And then they come apart like this…

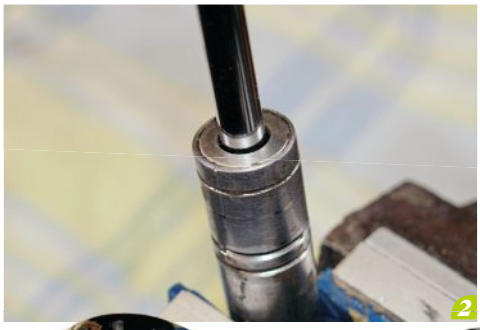
Inspection, cleaning and renovation

The inside of a shock absorber wasn't deigned to be pretty; they all look rather agricultural to be honest. The chrome plated lowers need to be hived off to a friendly plater ASAP. Check the damper rods for pitting and the seals for leaks. Many shocks are not designed to be reworked even to this point, but occasionally it is possible to remove the seal and rod via a threaded top collar. Many early Honda units are thus constructed.

If you have shocks so equipped you are indeed fortunate: carefully remove the collar, accurately measure how much damper oil is in the lower chamber and source new seals. Our examples in camera have a peened-over end and their dismantlement is beyond the scope of this article. It's worth running taps and dies over all the threads; if the lower cover won't unscrew off the rod hold the latter with the trusty pop rivet shaft and Bob's your uncle. Lever out rubber shock bushes and their supporting tubes, then check the integrity of the rubber. If they need replacing hunt down some alternatives, but if none are available look to specialist car shops for urethane suspension bushes and get a mate to machine some new bushes to suit.

All the alloy fittings will benefit from a spruce up via some paint stripper, a rotary mop and an abrasive pad. Collectively this little lot will remove any residual lacquer or corrosion. The choice between whether to polish or treat is yours; here the alloy eyes have had a quick coat of best self-etching clear lacquer, bringing them back close to original.

A large number of period Japanese shocks ran self-coloured plastic top shrouds and these often fade and oxidised with time. A quick session with a hard plastic headlamp restoring kit will bring back the colour. Obviously metal shrouds can be revived with a rattle can.



1: Abrasive wheel and pad cleans the alloy

2: Peened seal holder equals difficult replacement

3: Designed for headlights, works on bike plastics

4: Back from the platers and looking grand

Rebuilding

To use that time honoured and glib phrase: replacement is the reversal of removal – or words to that effect. With the rubber bushes massaged back into their homes it really is a just a case of reassembling the shocks with a little patience and TLC. It's always worth running a tap through the replated parts just in case the threads have picked up a little chrome. With some grease on the threads the lowers should fit on easily and then it's just a case of winding everything down tight. When the lowers are fully home the bottom eye can be screwed on until the holes for the roll pins line up. This may take a little jiggery-pokery but shouldn't be too much of a chore. Once aligned, the pins are gently tapped back in, and the job is, as they say, a good 'un. You can then smugly tell your mates that you carried out a cosmetic restoration of a pair of shock absorbers; a project no one else thought was viable.

5: Simply reload it all then add the lower shock eye

6: Knowing where the hole sits on the rod is key to lining everything up

7: Holes aligned via pop rivet shank, roll pin partially home

8: Rubber grease makes this so easy

9: And there you have a pair of period Japanese shocks beautifully tidied up

Damping

It's worth noting that when a shock is broken down to its component parts the apparent effects of the actual hydraulic damping system are best described as underwhelming. It's the spring that actually does the lion's share of the work; the damping simply mitigates the spring's worst excesses. It's effectively impossible to assess the efficacy of the damper, but as a rough rule of thumb the two rods should offer similar levels of resistance both when fully compressed and fully extended. If one is noticeably weaker than the other you have a problem. Worth noting is the simple fact that dampers often work harder in one direction than the other. This is normal and is the internal mechanism's way of ensuring the spring's expansion post compression is controlled and metred rather than violently reactive.

Alternative fixtures and disassembly damage

As mentioned previously, some shocks are held together with collets and such systems normally militate the use of spring compressors. Cheap to buy, they are vital if the shock is to come apart safely. The compressing bolts are wound down a little at a time on alternate sides until the collets can be safely removed. Pliers are best used here just in case one of the compressors lets go.

From here it's possible to strip the shock right down to its constituents ready for renovation. Any chrome plater worthy of the name should be more than capable of replating the springs, collets, mounting eyes and even the main body of the shock without impacting on the shock rod or its precious seal. And if you needed a cautionary note about what happens when you don't study what's in front of you and make rash assumptions, look at the mangled shock rod. They must never be grasped tight by anything, regardless of how sure you are they need to be! CBG

10: Spring compressors are mandatory here

11: Use pliers here or lose a fingernail

12: Everything slides off ready for renovation

13: And here's a shock rod damaged due to operator incompetence!

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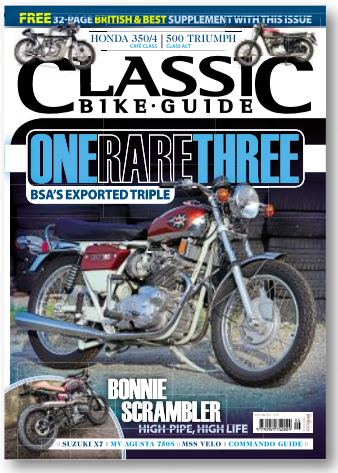

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Ariel Huntmaster
Ariel's bigger twin

A 650 twin was eventually added to Ariel's line-up, using most of a BSA engine to power it. They make for interesting rebuilds

WORDS BY ROB DAVIES **PHOTOS BY** ROB DAVIES AND DOUG WALKER

Above: They were an uncommon sight when new, and were under-appreciated for many years

A FEW WEEKS ago I had the good fortune to be invited along to one of the oldest established motorcycle clubs of our noble land, in Kings Norton Birmingham, where I had the honour to discover the most delightful bunch of biking guys you would ever wish to meet. Most of them were well over 140. But that's another story.

The main event of the night was a talk focused on one of the new breed of electric bikes (we all shuddered), the Zero, but we'll leave that for now. There I met Doug Walker, a slight, gently spoken man who I was informed was their local expert on the Ariel – and I wasn't to be disappointed.

My usual restoration pieces seem – I try my best – to follow a logical sequence. I knew this process was to go straight out of the window as soon as I visited Doug in his den and he started to unravel – yes that is the word – the story of his bikes.

He has two Huntmasters, one in original condition and one which he calls his 'special'. Hopefully in a few months' time we will take an in-depth look at the 'original', but that was not for today – the 'original' had lost its fuel tank – for now at least. So I focused my attention on the 'special' and I hope Ariel connoisseurs will be as intrigued by this bike as I was. And I have to say straight off the bat, Doug trained as a pattern maker in a galaxy far far away, and was reputed by his friends to be able to make anything.

CBG: So Doug. How did this bike come to be yours?

Doug: "Well, actually it didn't start out as a bike," said Doug, rubbing his chin and looking in a meditative way at the wall behind me. I knew then that I was in for trouble. "It started out as just a pair of crankcases." Who on earth – I mused to myself – would start out with just a pair of crankcases? But being a wise old owl, and not really very bright, I decided to keep schtum and listen, and it was a bit like listening to Ronny Corbett when he related one of his tall tales, but succeeds only in going off in every which way. I listened.

"And over the next year or so, I assembled a complete engine from bits, from various autojumbles. But you see all of this was to test a theory…" (He had that faraway look again.) "You see, there has been this controversy for years now about the bearings in BSAs and Ariels. You know – the bronze bush main bearings, and whether they should be changed for roller bearings." I knew too well of this topic and didn't wish to get involved between the disagreeing factions.

"So, I decided to make my own end feed conversion kit. I had seen the ones done by such worthies as SRM, and I wanted to make my own. I thought I could maybe come up with something different. What I wanted to do was fit a roller bearing instead of the bush, and make an oil feed system for it – one where you could still operate the engine while the timing cover was off. This meant that all of the internal oilways needed to be modified – and I did it! I fitted a roller bearing, designed the oil feed system, and it's still working well 20 years later." I was starting to get seriously impressed by this time by this humble courteous man – he'd made my wife and me cups of tea – of 78 years young). He looked lost in thought again, so I delicately prompted…

CBG: So, now you had a working engine?

Doug: "I did", said Doug, warming to his subject. "But what style of Ariel should I put it into? Especially as I don't like parting with too much money? So I decided that I would start acquiring more bits from autojumbles and make up what was in essence the export model, the Cyclone. You know, the one that Buddy Holly rode."

1: Although well disguised, most of the engine's major components were lifted from BSA's A10 twins. Crashbars add a bit of bling, but more importantly protect the bike if dropped

2: The Ariel's barrels and heads are a straight lift from the BSA A10 parts bin, although the rockerbox was redesigned to improve both looks and functionality. Sparks and lights from Mr Lucas's K2F magneto and E3L dynamo respectively. The more modern Amal has a drip tray – bike fires are best avoided

3 & 4: This is where Ariel puts the batteries; on show. That's not good enough for our Proud Owner, he prefers things to be done neatly. As seen here: Doug Walker's own matching nearside panel now covers the battery and matches the oil tank on the other side

5: Although the crashbars do obscure the view, you can see how well Ariel fitted the BSA engineered engine to their own primary drive, driving through a dry clutch to a four-speed Burman B52 gearbox

6: One advantage of the Ariel's use of BSA engine components is that in the modern age those spares are still available and affordable, and a rider who wants to ride something a little unusual and quite rapid enough can ride an Ariel hard. Winners all round, then

I didn't know this, but not wishing to appear an idiot I kept quiet. I've used this practice many, many times in the past and it has served me well.

"I think only about 200 were actually made, and there are only one or two here in the UK. But going back to the point of money… I wasn't about to spend a small fortune on getting every bit right – indeed I had certain ideas of making some parts myself, parts that might look better and be a lot cheaper." Cheap is good. I nodded, wishing to add something of value to the conversation.

"For instance, buying ordinary mudguards saved a lot of money. And a genuine headlight cowl was going to cost a fortune, so I made my own binnacle from an aluminium casting I designed myself. I also made the fork shrouds to hold the exposed headlight. The fuel tank came from an autojumble…" I was realising at this point that Doug attends a lot of autojumbles.

"But it was a centre bolt tank, as made for all the four-strokes between 1956 and when the factory closed in 1959. The oil tank is original, but I didn't like the look of the battery and toolbox on the other side of the bike. Ariel had left the battery exposed, possibly so that it could be checked and maintained more easily, and this left the adjacent toolbox looking a bit short, and nothing like a mirror image of the oil tank on the other side. There was no symmetry, you see."

CBG: So what did you do?

Doug: "I designed and made another toolbox to match the oil tank, and I made it out of vac-formed ABS, a very strong plastic used on the bumpers of cars. I made the former, and sucked a sheet of ABS into shape. You see, by then I was getting quite fond of the old girl and I wanted her to look right, but she needed to lose a bit of weight.

"So I made aluminium engine plates, and had alloy rims put onto Ariel hubs at Central Wheels in Birmingham. I used the vac-form method again to make the base of the seat. That was later upholstered by Leighton's in Birmingham, a well-known classic bike seat builder; they go way back.

"Then came the decision of what to do about the exhaust system. Fortunately I already had one of the original Burgess silencers (very expensive from you know where), and I wanted it to go on the off-side at the end of a pair of Siamese pipes. These were made for sidecar use – now that's another story. Not wanting to hack off the fitting bracket and wreck the chrome on the Burgess, I made a heat shield to protect them. But I did get lucky with the pipes. The originals had been made by Armours somewhere near Bournemouth, but there weren't any to be had, and

1: A neat self-made panel replaces the Ariel original, and houses an oil gauge, just to maintain confidence, or something

2: The forks work well, are well damped and sturdy. Indicators are always a useful addition

3: Pannier brackets, like no others you've seen before. The heatshield on the silencer is there to disguise the fact that it's a left-hand silencer, so the bracket is on the outside…

4: The front stopper has also been upgraded to a 2ls device. For some reason, the original sls full-width hub can be very variable in actual stopping terms

5 & 6: One of the very many benefits of Ariel ownership is one of the best owners' clubs around. They also have one of the best magazines, too. The 'Cheval de Fer' refers to the 'iron horse' motifs so beloved of Ariel itself and used in brochures and promo material

1: Doug Walker decided to modify his engine's oiling arrangement, replacing the plain timing side main bearing bush with a more supportive roller bearing. Although this is similar in principle to the justly famous SRM conversion, it is different in several areas. You can see the crank's worm gear which drives the oil pump, and also the drilled end of the crank itself through which oil is delivered to the big ends

2: The original Ariel timing side main bearing is a bush. Doug Walker has fitted a needle roller replacement, as seen here

3: The oil pump. A sound and reliable gear device

4: The pump in place. The new, revised 'feed stud' unions are clearly visible

5: Doug's self-designed and cast oil feed mechanism. This brass seal holder fits over the oil pump; the circlip retains the seal; oil goes via the hollow front stud and feeds the crank via a pipe. An additional pipe for an oil gauge is an optional extra

6: The complete assembly fitted. It's been running this way for 20 years so far…

Armours hadn't made any Ariel pipes for years; but I still rang them up. They said that they still had all the templates, etc and would make me a one off – how's about that for service?

"I made the centre aluminium strip on the fuel tank myself. It's not an easy job to do a double curve, but you have to fit one to cover the central welded seams, and then she was pretty much ready to go."

CBG: So how many modifications were made to the Ariel altogether?

Doug: Oh, more than a dozen I would say; the eagle eye will spot many of them; but they include a twin leading front shoe, front mudguards and fork shrouds, the aluminium steering damper knob, headlamp conversion to H4, concentric carb, a sump plate with a drain plug and a magnet (dead useful). There's also a primary chaincase oil seal (an idea I pinched off a BSA), an A10 rear brake crossover system, and an Ariel badge on the clutch dome – again mine.

1

After the interview – a time when I couldn't take in any more information and I had received a sound understanding of not only the workings of the 650 Huntmaster, but of the Ariel works, we went down the lane to take some photos. And then Doug asked me whether I'd like to ride the bike back?

Would I like to? Well of course I would! But, and it was a big but – and yes I did have adequate insurance – I have to confess big time (please, priests of motorcycles, please please forgive my error) I haven't ridden, or kicked off a big twin Brit bike for some 35 years. And if you have been taking this excellent magazine over the last 12 months or so, you may know that I have a rather gorgeous Honda 650 dohc Nighthawk. So… I sat on the bike, looking down at the unfamiliar pedal arrangement and trying desperately to take in those ancient handlebar controls. I then threw myself into the air, dropped purposely on the kickstart lever and the bike sprang into life – at the first kick; boy was that satisfying!

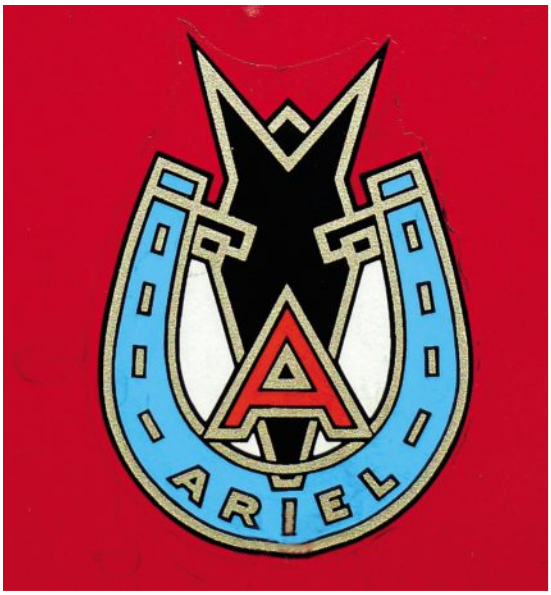
"Now what did you say the gears were, Doug? Was it one down and four up – or one up and three down – or was it one down and three sideways? Oh drat…"

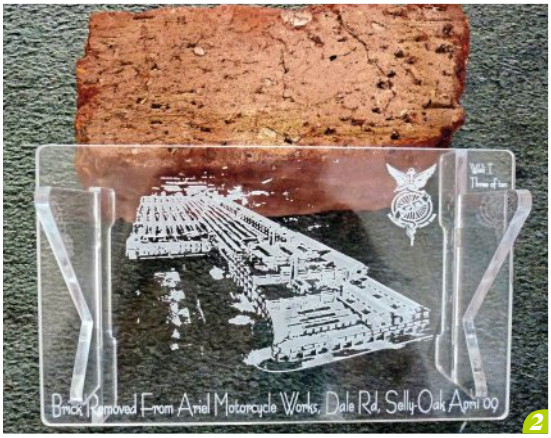
"It's one up and three down," came the calm response. So in came the soft clutch – softer even than my Honda's hydraulic lever, a gentle lift with the right toe, and with an most imperceptible soft click – the Honda goes CLUNK – first gear was engaged. I slowly felt for the bite point of the clutch – thank goodness that was where it was supposed to be – and I moved positively down the lane, being pleasantly surprised by the feel and sound of the big old twin. Sadly the ride was all too brief, and I had to hand it back. Ah well. Next time… CBG

1: Where it all happens. Doug's Den, complete with his 'original' Huntmaster

2: When the Ariel factory was demolished, some owners wept. Others got a brick as a memento

3: Ready to ride. Doug Walker's well-modded machine. His own iron horse, maybe





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BMW R100RS 1979, 9800 miles, fully restored, matching engine & frame numbers, original ATE (brakes), Brembo (brakes) & BMW parts inc, £6495 no offers. Email. barryedwards1958@gmail.com

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

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

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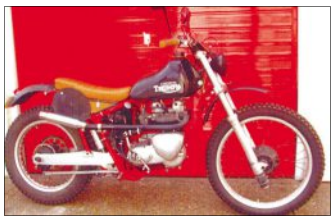

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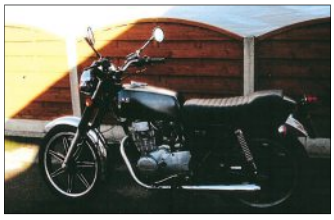
YAMAHA RD350LC 4LO 1985, vgc, MoT, in good working order, engine & frame both 4LO although not matching numbers, £4250 ono Tel. 07496 018579 W Sussex

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

YAMAHA XJ650 1993, good condition, new tyres, needs tlc, new shocks and spare ones, topbox, no MoT, £1200 ono Tel. 01539 740359 Cumbria



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 XT500 Cheney Enduro, 1977, genuine authentic road legal, excellent original condition, extremely rare, £6400 ono Tel. 07905 769497 West Midlands

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

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 SILVERWING 650cc, wanted must be top condition with all the bits, fairing, panniers, topbox etc, good price paid Tel. Bob 01234 768981. Beds.

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

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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.

VELOCETTE VIPER 1956, 350cc, excellent condition, 45 miles since professional engine overall, must be seen, £7500 Tel. 07531 542964. Durham.

YAMAHA RADIAN 1987, 600cc, 4 cylinder, vgc, MoT September 2017, new Dunlop tyres, proper retro bike, may swap or p/x twinshock trials bike or TY mono, £1400 Tel. 07967 953272. Herefordshire.

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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.

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BSA B31/33 wanted a pair of B31/33 Dynamo type primary chaincases or just the inner case please, also any other parts to help rebuild Tel. 01865 762859. Oxfordshire.

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DOES ANYONE HAVE a pair of good crankcases for the 1926 P&M 500cc Panther I am restoring? I think other years (1924-1930) will fit, my cases are cracked and repaired but I don't trust them, please help get this rare bike back on the road Rhode Island, USA. Hanscars8L@gmail.com

EARLY MARK 1 Velocette KSS/KTS petrol tank, any Smiths rev counter but preferably RC83, Smiths 80mph, speedometre Tel. 07817 086037. Lothian.

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.

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

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

NORTON WD 16H wanted, a nice original one not too mucked about with would be good but anything complete considered, send me some photos and what you're asking Tel. 07917 406048. Surrey.

RALEIGH RM6 1966 engine covers and chain covers, Honda XBR500 front mudguard any colour Tel. 02392 713432. Hampshire.

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.

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

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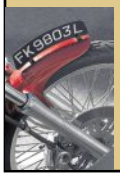

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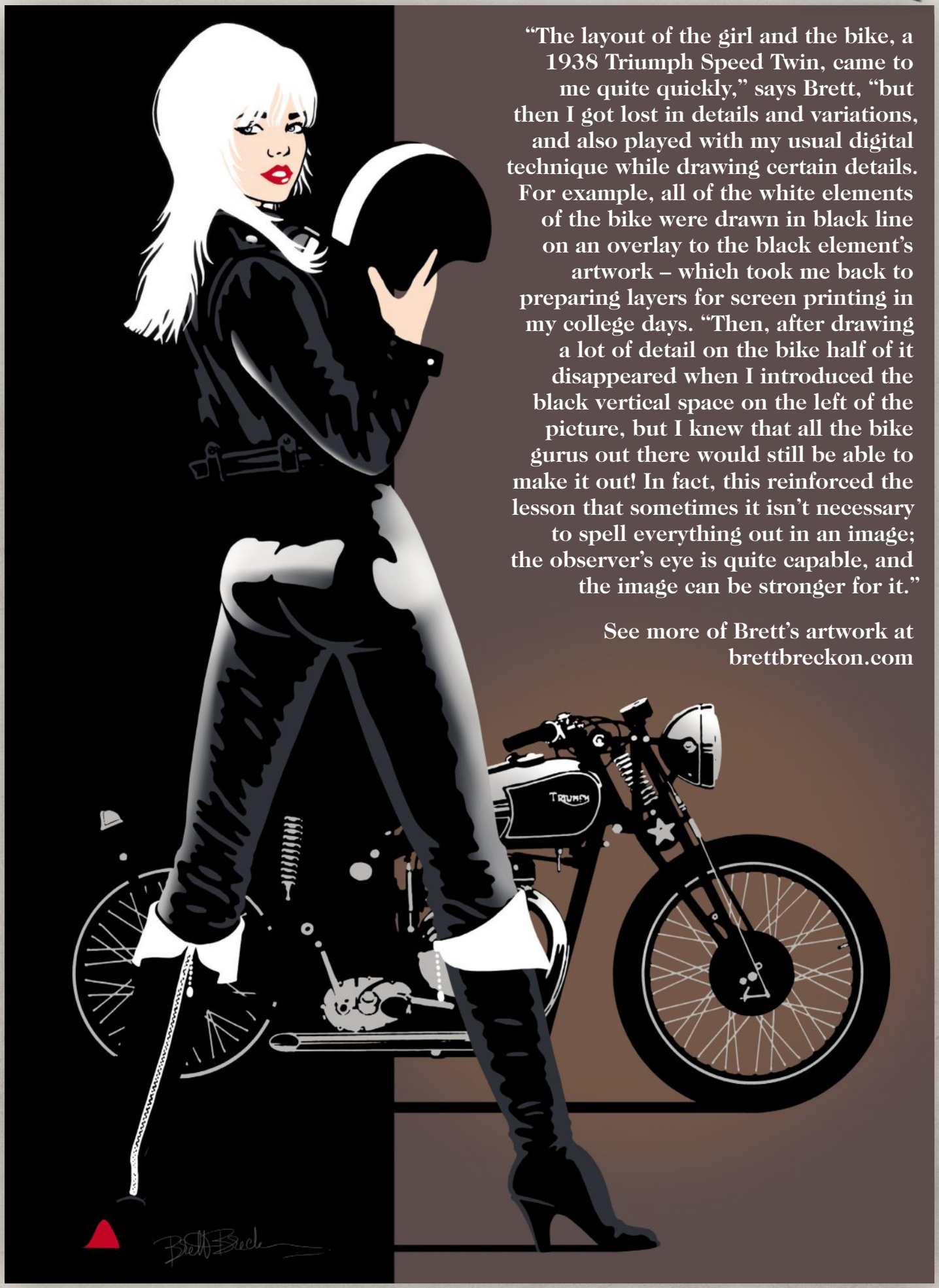
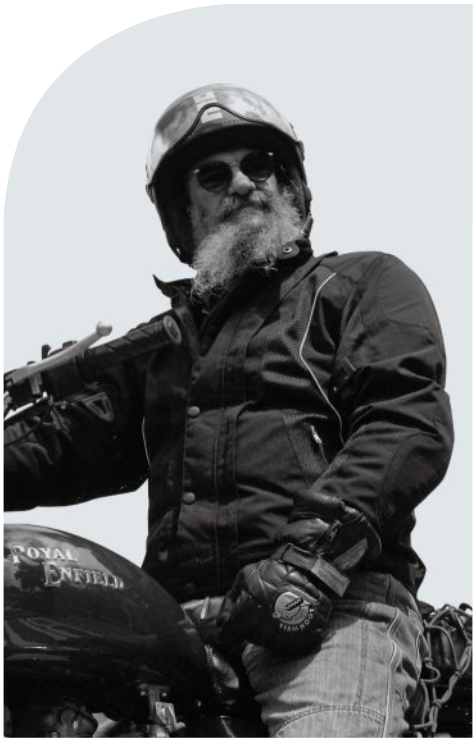


"The layout of the girl and the bike, a 1938 Triumph Speed Twin, came to me quite quickly," says Brett, "but then I got lost in details and variations, and also played with my usual digital technique while drawing certain details. For example, all of the white elements of the bike were drawn in black line on an overlay to the black element's artwork – which took me back to preparing layers for screen printing in my college days. "Then, after drawing a lot of detail on the bike half of it disappeared when I introduced the black vertical space on the left of the picture, but I knew that all the bike gurus out there would still be able to make it out! In fact, this reinforced the lesson that sometimes it isn't necessary to spell everything out in an image; the observer's eye is quite capable, and the image can be stronger for it."

See more of Brett's artwork at brettbreckon.com



FRANK WESTWORTH

Famous last words

Too much spare time; too much choice

THEY GO IN cycles, don't they? I'm sure there's a joke in this somewhere. Cycles? Motorcycles? Oh never mind.

Cycles of what? Cycles of classicness, that's what. I've been suffering from it nonstop since the first day of the year. Maybe it happens every year, and maybe it doesn't, but it seems somehow more intense this time.

Cycles of classicness… cycles of desirability as applied to old motorcycles. I'm unsure whether anyone else suffers from it – although it's pretty likely, given the difficulty of grabbing the cheap old notveryclassic bikes I'm hankering after at the moment. And I'm unsure whether it's actually an age thing, as are most cycles – although it certainly is a nostalgia thing. And a personal thing, so apologies for talking about myself here.

It's becoming increasingly obvious to the lump of pudding I might describe as my brain that my views of bikes change. Nothing new in that, although the rate of change seems to be increasing. And it does appear to affect other people, too. A good friend has invested (I would have written 'wasted' but wish to cause no outrage… okay, only a little… maybe) a minor fortune on a particularly uninspired Honda from a particularly dull period of motorcycle development. Of course I said kind things while keeping my views of his sanity mostly to myself, but I did wonder. Because I hanker only after classics. Real ones. Not wheezing middleweight mass-produced mediocrities from some vast factory in a strange land. No. Not for me. Last year was very good from my personal classicness viewpoint because I acquired a 1948 AJS 18, a superb machine, an example of my own first real bike, back in 1971, and well worth the effort. It cost less than my pal's insignificant Honda, too, so smugness abounds.

But I find myself remarkably irritated today. Today was the day I intended to bid for a BMW. Stop laughing. On that traditionally well known auction site sat an R1100R, in red. It looked very nice and when I saw it in passing I was reminded that we ran an identical machine in the family back when they were current in 1996 or so. It broke several times – how many gearboxes? Starter motors? – but it was fun. Hardly a classic, though, by most definitions. But having seen it – along with a lot of other old bikes offered for sale – I somehow couldn't forget or ignore it. I even wondered whether it was the same bike, as it had several of the add-ons we'd… ah… added on to ours. Including a Baglux tank harness; wonderful things. I mailed the vendor. It wasn't our old bike, so was plainly better somehow. I have no idea why or how it could be better, but that's the power of idiot optimism.

I decided to bid. A pal announced that if I bought it and didn't get on with it he'd buy it from me for what I'd paid. Can't fail.

No one bid on it. It was very cheap – by 'classic' standards. The auction was due to end at the exact moment that I'm typing this. Except it ended early for no obvious reason. No bids. Of course I am theatrically outraged – to no purpose. This happens all the time. It's just one of those things. No, what is bewildering me a little is that I was apparently so keen to buy an unremarkable bike in unremarkable condition. Not least because I ran another similar machine – an R1150R Rockster – for a couple of years, selling it last year because I kept falling off it. Which is irritating and embarrassing, as I'm sure you'll appreciate.

The only bikes which should inspire such an acquisitive longing are classics, surely? Or super-modern super-duper aspirational Superbikes and the like. Not an early version of a fairly pedestrian touring machine – direct descendants of which are available new at your friendly BMW shop. What appears to have happened is that the R1100R is somehow surfing the wave of classicness which ticks steadily over in my head. It appears to work in cycles, too. For ages I'd ignore – say – MZ strokers as being dreadful commuter tributes to former Sovbloc austerity ingenuity, and then quite suddenly I'll look at one and think 'Wows, such purity of thought, elegance, simplicity and minimalist motorcycling made metal' – along with other apparently pretentious twaddle – and find myself reaching for the wallet.

Usually, sanity steps in. Usually.

Happily, following the sudden inexplicable unavailability of 'my' R1100R, a pal sent me details of another, later, lower mileage and better condition R1100R. Far better bet and value there. But it was blue. And the Bagster tank bag I've preserved since that 1996 R1100R is red. So the blue one is the wrong R1100R. It needs to match my bag. So you see things do come in cycles. Cycles of madness. CBG

'It's becoming increasingly obvious to the lump of pudding I might describe as my brain that my views of bikes change. Nothing new in that, although the rate of change seems to be increasing…'

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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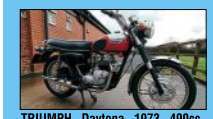
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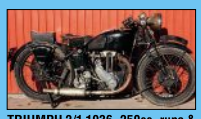
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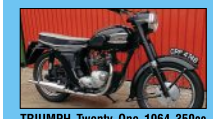
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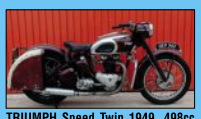
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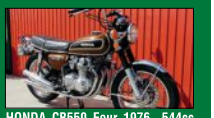
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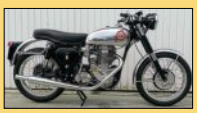
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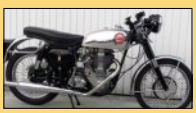
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