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006 **RIDING LIFE**
News, much of it. New oil can and even more excitement. Also a report on a super Scottish show

012 **SUBSCRIBE!**
Save a little money, get the magazine a little early. Thrills beyond imagination. Hopefully

022 **EARLY WARNING**
Get ready for the Beezumph Rally

026 **TRIUMPH TR6**
Better bet than a Bonnie. Perhaps. Almost

032 **KAWASAKI W650**
Truly unusual Rocket Gold Star replica

038 **BMW R75/5**
Entirely adequate Teutonic tourist

042 **ROYAL ENFIELD CONTINENTAL**
The original 250 learner flyer. In red

046 **MOTO GUZZI 400 GTS**
V-twin experts also tried a few fours. Unusual, too

050 **HONDA CX650**
From Maggot to Eurosport. A hard road

054 **A VELOCETTE LIFE**
From roadster to racer and back again



062 **PAUL D'ORLÉANS**
Mexican motorcycle magic

064 **MARK WILLIAMS**
The quest for affordable patriotism

066 **PAUL MILES**
All praise the modern bike?

068 **BSA THUNDERBOLT**
Bright red and shiny too. Just the job

078 **HARLEY-DAVIDSON MODEL 17**
Very scary eight-valve racer from way, way, way back

090 **CLASSIC CLUBS**
Visit the Morini OC, join in, ride more

092 **ROYAL ENFIELD'S MANY BULLETS**
A big guide to the most affordable old bikes

102 **NORTON COMMANDO BUILD**
Improving an 850, twin discs and an electric foot help

110 **READER ADS**
Here be temptation, lots of it

128 **INK WHEELS**
Co-ordination by Talana Gamah

130 **FRANK WESTWORTH**
Brakes for the brave

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FRANK WESTWORTH

VEE TIME TOO

ALL OF A SUDDEN – and it always somehow comes as a complete surprise – the clocks spring forward and winter's gone. You can perform physics as well as I can, and we both know that the clock shift has no effect on the weather. Come along now, it can't. But it does.

No sooner did I remember to shift the clocks – prompted by the fact that I was an hour out somehow – than sunshine descended on the Cornish fastness where I lay my head. Just like that. And with the sunshine, so with the hordes of bikes. Hordes. It's like an invasion sometimes. Generally peaceful and silent car parks are suddenly clogged with machinery, some of it interesting – in fact much of it is interesting from some point of view or other. Car parks filled with parked cars – as you'd expect them to be – are generally pretty dull, though the Cornish summer auto invasion beings with it more VW camper vans that you could believe were ever built. Not so when the car parks are filled with bikes. There's a buzz, a glitter, a tension…

…and there's a lot of noise. A lot. At the outbreak of every summer I find myself wondering how many of these machines ever pass an MoT, and if they're too new to suffer that particular indignity, how they get away without enraging officers of the law. Were there any around, which there rarely are. I think I answered my own question by accident. A decent proportion of the racket, oddly enough, isn't from exhausts. It's from the engines themselves, many of which whine and whistle even at tickover.

I'd parked up the almost-modern twin, chasing that elusive sunny day ice cream, and was feeling smug and at the same time outraged in a genteel, superior way that just about every bike around was making much more noise than my own, which has an impossibly quiet engine for an air-cooled twin, and all its original – quiet – exhaust kit. Phuttered off, ice cream addiction sated, feeling cool, calm and socially responsible, somehow. I am an elder, an almost distinguished gentleman, after all.

Returned the following day on the ancient Brit, enjoying its first riding summer in a couple of decades. Ice cream. Return to motorcycle. Apply the vast wristful of throttle it demands before it will start … and made more noise than everyone else. These 1940 silencers are … less than silent. Maybe I should stop criticising others.

That's it. See you out there.

Frank Westworth
editor@classicbikeguide.com

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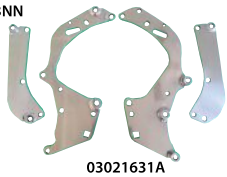

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Open for Norton

NORTON SPECIALIST NORVIL'S holding an open day and mini autojumble on Saturday, July 22 from 10am-4pm at their premises in Burntwood, between Lichfield and Cannock.

Norvil's customer counter is usually only open by appointment, so this is an opportunity to pop in and look around – and aficionados can speak to Norton guru Les Emery and pick his brains.

Norvil stocks about 8000 new Norton parts and kits of parts for sale and has a huge stock of both restored and second-hand treasure to pick through. At the first event last year they invited a few stallholders at no charge for a stall and that offer remains open. The local Norton Owners' Club branch will be there too.

There will be free tea, coffee and snacks, so if anyone wants a ride out with some free refreshments and a Norton natter at the end, this is an ideal opportunity for a summer run.

Norvil is at 96-98 Cannock Road, Chase Terrace, Burntwood, WS7 1JP

BOLT UP



AFTER DECADES BEING UNDONE and endlessly retorqued, twin cylinder BSA cylinder head nuts, studs and bolts are likely to be getting a little tired. British motorcycle engine specialist SRM has now added head bolt sets to its product range, specifically for torqueing down the cylinder head on classic BSA twins. They have been produced in the UK and are cold drop forged, thread rolled, heat treated to high tensile specification and then chemically blacked. There are sets available to fit A7 and A10 cast iron and alloy heads as well as A50 and A65 models from between 1966-1970 and 1971-1972.

Prices range between £47.10 and £56.34 depending on the model.

SRM are on 01970 62771 or visit www.srmclassicbikes.com



The café culture keeps on collecting new disciples. This would be one Mr C Fogarty of whom you may have heard, picking up his Thruxton R from Youles Motorcycles after they fitted it with Vance and Hines pipes and LED lights and removed the lumpy rear mudguard



COLOUR COMMANDO
Really, really red
P102



BITING THE BULLET
Great guide to buying one
P92



BETTER BEEZER?
Bet it's not...
P32

KICKING BACK

SHOWS ARE GREAT ways to relax after a week at the grindstone, and the recent Kickback event at Stoneleigh was more relaxing than most. Plenty to see, plenty of space to see it in, and plenty of friendly folk to relax with. Good catering and easy parking too. But the main event of the event is always the bikes. Here's a few for you to gaze at. More please. Now, relax...

thecustomshow.com







PHOTOS BY LINDSAY DONALDSON

LONELY HEARTS CLUB

INSURANCE BROKER CAROLE NASH has been helping like-minded bikers share their love of motorcycles with their #BikerBuddy campaign.

The campaign was launched after Carole Nash commissioned research which revealed many bikers, especially those getting older, were finding it tricky to meet people to ride with. The initiative saw hundreds of motorcyclists share a quick description of the type of biker they are, and what kind of biker buddy they were looking for. A poll of 1000 adults found that nearly two thirds of people want to make new friends.

Although half of those surveyed claimed that they have between one and three close mates, the survey also found that a whopping three-quarters only get to see their close friends once over a two to four week period, and more than one in 10 said they hardly ever see their mates.

Commenting on the research findings, psychologist Dr Becky Spelman said: "A clear majority of people want to make new friends. One of the best ways to connect with others is through a shared interest, and biking can be a great way to make likeminded friends, as it's so community-focused."

Rebecca Donohue, head of marketing at Carole Nash, said: "We know how important mates are to our customers, which is why we offer an extra benefit to our policies, called Rider Cover3. If you're a Carole Nash policyholder this gives you accidental damage cover when riding your mate's bike anywhere in the UK, whether it's through the countryside or a busy city centre. As long as both bikes have comprehensive cover and you have permission from the owner, you can ride any bike with total peace of mind – perfect for when you fancy riding your mate's bike.

"It's true that enjoying the open road on two wheels is best experienced with a friend, which is why we launched our #BikerBuddy campaign to recruit as many bikers as we possibly can, so people can share their love of motorcycles with others."

Find fulfilment at www.carolenash.com



No need to ride the byways all by yourself...





PHOTOS BY NIK SAMSON

MUSEUM PIECES

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY that you can take to the road on such exotica as a Brough Superior or Norton Rotary F1. But if you're a member of the National Motorcycle Museum Friends scheme you could get that chance.

A recent Classic Bike Tour Day saw museum Friends take up the opportunity to ride some of the most exciting and valuable classic motorcycles from the museum's inventory.

Those taking part received an induction and off-road instruction before being escorted by ex-police motorcyclists and IAM instructors around the Warwickshire countryside close to the museum. Each class of machine attracts a different hire fee which includes insurance cover and lunch in the museum restaurant.

The Ride a Classic Weekend in April saw more than 100 museum friends scheme members ride a diverse range of classic motorcycles from the museum's inventory, including a BSA Gold Star, Sunbeam Model 9, Ariel Cyclone 650 and an ex-WD 1940 Triumph. And the next Classic Bike Tour Day is on Saturday, June 17, with further events



including classic track days and workshop days planned for later in the year. An annual Friends subscription costs up to £29.95, and in addition to that the riding day cost £10 per rider to help cover insurance costs.

Contact the museum on 01675 443311 or join at www.thenmm.co.uk

YORKSHIRE HAMMER

A PRIVATE COLLECTION of 14 motorcycles ranging from a 50cc Jawa moped to a 1983 BMW R100 will go under the hammer in North Yorkshire in June.

Mathewsons in Pickering is selling the collection of Peter Hall, a local motor trader from Robin Hood's Bay.



Above: Handsome 1925 Scott Squirrel from the collection

Right: Peter Hall's collection arrives in Pickering

Pride of place in the sale on Saturday, June 3 is a 1924 Rex-Acme 8 HP Combination. Peter spent his spare time either working on his vehicles or competing in local and national trials. He would often load a trials bike into an old London taxi, drive many miles to the venue, sleep overnight in the cab and compete the following day.

The Rex-Acme is attached to a sidecar hand-made by a local joiner. The combo was acquired some 50 years ago in a swap which appeared a little short on the part of the then owner – so Peter secured the deal by adding a cash injection of £1. Also on offer are a 350cc CCM competition trials bike and a 1925 Scott Squirrel.

The vehicle auction starts at 1pm, with vehicle memorabilia on sale from 10am.

www.mathewsons.co.uk.



Peter Hall's £1 Rex Acme



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MAX GUARDS

CAFÉ RACER AND SPECIAL builder Redmax has begun selling an in-house produced range of alloy mudguards, competition plates and other parts.

Steve Hillary from Redmax in Devon was finding it hard to find suitable short alloy guards and other parts, so has engaged a metalsmith to make the range by hand using a metal fabricating device known as an English Wheel.

The first batch of 50 short mudguards sold out and a fresh batch is in production. Alloy competition plates, long unobtainable from British manufacturers, have also been a hit with specials builders. Short guards are



£50, broader rear mudguards are £99 and competition plates are £15.

Redmax also produces café racer parts such as alloy and GRP petrol tanks, seats for specials and flat trackers and alloy café racer humps.

Visit www.redmaxspeedshop.com.



BIG AND BOXY

THE SUCCESS OF MANY a small business used to be based around the versatility of the tradesman's sidecar. Now the practical box is making a comeback with the latest stylish addition to the Watsonian range.

While you won't see a butcher's boy or builder's apprentice piloting one on L-plates today, the appropriately named Mule is ideal for riders who need to carry serious amounts of kit, whether for camping, fishing or commercial use. The British designed and built Mule sidecar has a galvanised steel, powder coated trunk that provides approximately 300 litres of carrying capacity. Watsonian developed a new box section chassis for the Mule, featuring rubber 'Flexitor' suspension and a 10-inch steel wheel. It is fitted with a classic mudguard and is supplied complete with lights, indicators and a wiring loom, prepared for connection to the bike's 12V system.

A spare wheel is mounted to the back, and because all sidecars are built to order in Watsonian's UK factory various accessories can be added, including luggage racks, spotlights and jerry cans.

The Watsonian Mule sells for £2,995 including VAT. A factory fitting service is available.

Call 01386 700907 or visit www.watsonian-squire.com

EXHAUSTED

LONG-ESTABLISHED BRITISH AFTERMARKET exhaust maker Motad has ceased trading. The company has announced on its website that it has closed and receivers have been appointed to deal with winding up the company. A creditors' meeting has been held.

Motad began making racing exhausts in 1968 in London, and had its boom years in the 1970s and 80s selling replacements for the always expensive and sometimes poor quality factory items fitted to Japanese machines. Its first 4-1 exhausts for Honda 500 and 750 fours were still in production when the company closed the doors.

The company moved to a factory in Walsall in 1980 and as supplier to Triumph Motorcycles supplied all the company's exhausts for over 10 years until Triumph moved production to the far east. They also made exhausts for early Hesketh bikes.

A downturn in trading recently had resulted in unsustainable pressure on cashflow and the business was forced to cease trading. Motad had attempted to find a buyer for the business but this was unsuccessful due to the high cost base and uncertainty over future revenues. John Lowe, joint liquidator at FRP Advisory said: "This much-loved motorbike parts business is steeped in history and regrettably it was forced to close its doors after its principal customer chose to manufacture in-house, which contributed to the decision that the business was no longer financially viable.

"In the interests of creditors the joint liquidators are in the process of selling off the assets, which primarily include motorbike exhaust systems, machinery and jigs and we encourage interested parties to make contact."

Vintage Japanese spares specialist David Silver Spares has bought the company's stock of unsold Honda systems from the liquidator.





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ONE CAREFUL OWNER

TRIUMPH DEALERSHIP JACK Lilley, which has been selling motorcycles in the London area since the 1950s, has a new owner. The business has been bought by the Lind Group which also owns BMW and Harley-Davidson dealerships.

Jack Lilley Ltd was established in 1959 in Shepperton, selling Lambretta, NSU, BSA and Norman lightweights, as well as outboard motors, scoring success with the start of the scooter boom. Turned down by most British manufacturers as an agency at the time, the firm signed up with Honda and later became one of the first Hinckley-appointed Triumph dealerships in 1991, and in that 26-year relationship has played a major part in helping the Triumph brand establish itself in the UK.

Initially operating from its Shepperton premises, that was soon outgrown and they moved to the current, larger Ashford store. In 2013 Lilley acquired an additional Triumph dealership in Romford. The Triumph team and the Lilley family say they have been working closely together to identify a buyer for the business before sealing the deal with the Lind Group.

Dave Lilley, MD, commented: "The Lind Group is renowned for delivering a first-class customer experience, possessing unrivalled sales and aftersales knowledge and putting customers at the heart of its business, all of which were key attractions for us."

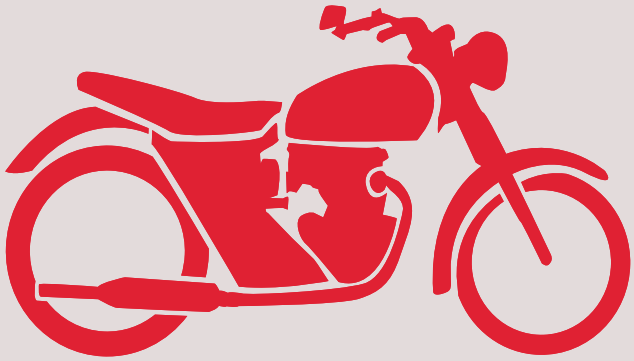
Russ Dacre of Lind said: "As a growing company we are extremely excited that the two Jack Lilley Triumph dealerships are joining our family."

Lind also owns Harley-Davidson dealerships in Newmarket and Reading, and BMW dealers Lind Motorrad in Welwyn Garden City.

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- **Saturday 12th August**
- **Saturday 16th September**
- **Saturday 28th October**
- **Saturday 9th December**







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Classic & Custom

EVENT SHOW REPORT

WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Several bikes associated with racer Bob McIntyre formed the SCRMC's tribute display

Above right: 'Thanks for stopping,' says the sign on the Rudge rider. 'I'm all right. I am waiting on a friend… he's on a Vincent.' We'll make no comments about oil. None at all. No

MINDFUL THAT MARCH in Scotland can mean ice, blizzards, floods or brilliant sunshine, the Scottish Motorcycle Show is now mainly contained in three large, heated halls. Thankfully this year's show broke recent tradition with uncharacteristically mild weather and no snow. As a result the stunt shows and bike fire-ups were very well attended, leaving many attendees more than a bit deaf the following day.

Catering for a wide range of tastes, there were plenty of new machines showcased. Triumph's Street Cup with its very reasonable 30in seat height, potential 76mpg and 10,000 mile service interval proved extremely popular, as did Royal Enfield's Continental GT and Himalayan. A wide variety of stands offered services ranging from tools, riding gear, spare parts and gel seat pads, right down to a beard trim and haircut! A rather small autojumble offered a brief glimmer of hope to those trying to source hard-to-find parts, but the classic displays were for many the obvious main attraction.

It's always reassuring to see machines which are used and enjoyed rather than pure show bikes. Ingliston featured an interesting mixture of both. There was a good selection of club stands, enthusiastically representing most marques and models with impressive and unusual machinery, ancient and modern, to suit all tastes.

Scottish Classic Racing Motorcycle Club members proudly displayed their anniversary tribute to Bob McIntyre, the first man to lap the TT course at over 100mph on a Gilera four during the 1957 Senior race. The Manx Norton attracted a lot of attention, and it was great to hear Bob's 1951 AJS Works 7R running – from a safe distance. The VJMC had a great turnout of fascinating and rare machines on its stand and the VMCC was presented with the prize for best stand by Niall MacKenzie, this year's guest of honour along with sons Taylor and Tarran.

The next major classic event north of the border is the Scottish Classic Motorcycle Show on Saturday, June 17 at Ayr Racecourse. **See ayrclassicmc.com**











NORTON SPECIAL

Weslake was instrumental in the development of car engines, most notably Jaguar for many years. Moving on to motorbike engines, Weslake-powered singles were particularly successful in grass track and speedway, then Rickman asked them to create eight-valve heads for the Triumph twins. Nourish Racing Engines later took on the patterns and continued refining them.

This Norton Weslake / NRE twin was built in 2007 and has covered less than 4000 miles since. The 1959 wideline Norton featherbed chassis is finished in the distinctive pale metallic blue of racing Weslakes. The 950cc engine was built by Dave Nourish with a Nourish crank and eight-valve head, driving through a four-speed Commando gearbox which has been webbed inside for strength. A belt primary drive has been fitted, with stopping power supplied by Lockheed brakes.

Initially it ran 11:1 compression on methanol – which proved too much for the kickstart spindle. So the special currently runs on super unleaded, with a lowered ratio to allow better characteristics for road use – but it's still quite a handful. Owner Euan reckons this machine is realistically capable of about 155mph. Although it's a bit hot for road use, the NRE is road-registered which could make it ideal for parading at the Isle of Man.

Look out for a full feature in *CBG* soon…



MOTO GUZZI FALCONE

Based on Guzzi's Condor, the Falcone could be easily upgraded to a similar spec to its sporting counterpart, the Dondolino, but was significantly cheaper. This made the Falcone an affordable, attractive proposition and it enjoyed a long production run, supported by police and military use. This particular machine was created during peak production in 1957 when 700 Falcones left the factory.

The horizontal four-stroke 499cc ohv single makes for a long, low engine with a large external flywheel which spins backwards. The front end debunks the idea that upside-down forks are a recent invention, while the rear suspension is similarly interesting with twin springs in a box under the engine and eye-catching adjustable scissor-type friction dampers.

The oil pump, clutch actuator and gearshift mechanism are all external, while grease nipples abound. With easy access there's no excuse for poor maintenance; to remove the cylinder head you simply unbolt the whole front end and lift it away.

The key simply slots into the headlamp, becoming a feature in itself, and is only required for the headlamp and horn, while the fusebox is hidden neatly away inside the headlamp. As was common in the 1950s, the speedo was an optional extra. Tools and spares can be readily accommodated in the matching compartments on the rear. The pop-up petrol cap, distinctive fishtail silencer and Moto Guzzi-logo'd hand pump are nice features.

Initially attracted by the quirkiness of the flywheel, the Falcone has fascinated its owner, George, for a long time. He finally found this beautiful machine last year, unfortunately in Italy with an owner who didn't speak English. After testing Google translate to the limit, George headed to Italy to check the Falcone out. Reassuringly, the bike started easily and ticked over in the slow characteristic manner of the 500 single that George finds particularly pleasing. A test ride confirmed the bike pulled well two-up and wasn't smoking. The only issues were a poor front brake and a dead battery. George sealed the deal, taking the opportunity to enjoy a few days in Sicily before returning home.

Registering the machine in Britain took several months, giving George a chance to adjust the front brake and sort out the battery (refreshing the acid and charging it worked wonders). Riding the Falcone is now a most enjoyable experience. The bike handles well on corners, the engine pulls well, gear changing is smooth and there is a pleasant crisp note from the fishtail exhaust. George looks forward to enjoying many miles on his latest acquisition: after all, he went quite a way to find it.



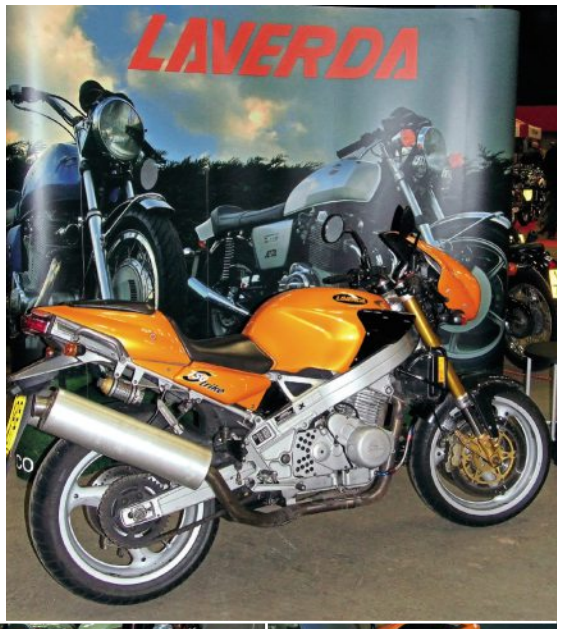



LAVERDA STRIKE

The stunning strike was one variant offered during Francesco Tognon's sadly short-lived relaunch of the brand in the 1990s. The Strike was certainly eye-catching in flamboyant metallic orange livery with a twin headlight bikini fairing. Tognon's factory at Zane initially launched an air-cooled 668cc twin, an evolution of Laverda's 1970s 497cc Alpino engine. This was followed up with a larger, liquid-cooled 750 range with Strike, Sport and Formula options.

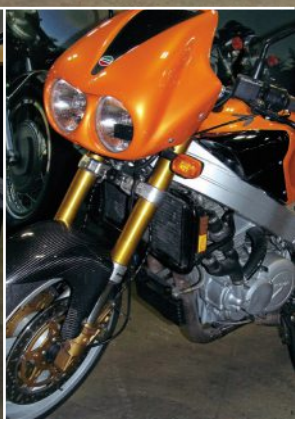
The Strike's 82bhp liquid cooled, dohc, eight valve, fuel injected 747cc twin packed a punch. Likened in performance to a Ducati 748, Tognon's sporty twin had a claimed top speed of around 133mph. A monoshocked aluminium beam frame with Paioli upside down forks, lightweight Marchesini three spoke wheels and triple disc Brembos, in true Laverda style, meant it handled competently too.

The electrics proved problematic although online forums suggest fixes. The engine however is considered by many to be the weakest component. Crank issues are cited, particularly in hard ridden examples, although specialist help is available. This means that you can now pick up a Strike for considerably less than the £7500 it cost new. While it may not be the traditional type of over-engineered beauty from the Breganze factory, the Strike is an interesting machine which could have been Laverda's future. As a classic, it may be worth a punt.



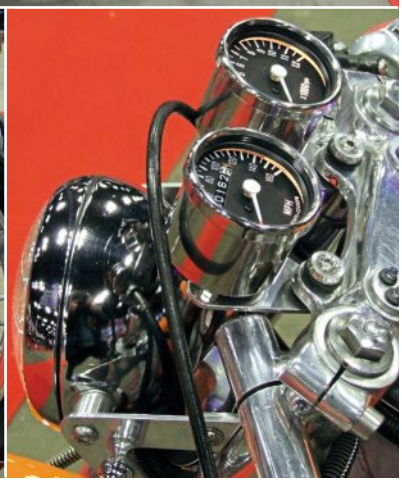












SUZUKI STROKER SPECIAL

This stunning café racer was created by Tony Lloyd from a standard 1976 GT500 Suzuki two-stroke which was in an extremely sorry state. As the donor bike was in such poor condition, Tony had a great chance to be creative. He fabricated a long list of elegant one-off components: clip-ons, rearsets, front mudguard and seat, and he also braced the frame. He formed the beautiful oil tank, the glass fibre petrol tank cover and the actual aluminium tank which is hidden underneath, and he took the opportunity to get the wheels rebuilt with flanged alloy rims.

The engine, forks and brakes are practically the only standard components. Considering the engine had been stood for almost three decades in a damp shed, it was in surprisingly good condition, and when stripped, it was found to still be on a standard bore. The crank was taken apart to fit new seals and the bores were carefully honed. Tony replaced the engine mounting bushes and drilled the front disc to give more bite. The forks were stripped and rebuilt, a steering damper was fitted and LED warning lights were neatly incorporated too.

Pete has owned this machine for just under a year. He wasn't too keen on the black finish of the Allspeed exhaust system when he bought the GT so has polished it up. He reckons it's nice for a wee blast. Brakes and handling are good, almost up to modern standards and he finds it an easy bike to live with. Just before the show there was a small leak in the two-stroke oil line, which he's now fixed.

The finishing touch to put a smile on Pete's face was the news that the GT is now classed as a historical vehicle so he won't need to pay road tax any more!



BULLET STREET-TRACKER

Alasdair bought this bullet when he left school about six years ago. It was running well and was totally standard, so he rode it stock for a few years while at university. It was great fun but suffered the effects of the British climate and got pretty rusty. Alasdair squeezed it into his mum's garden shed, stripped it down and set about lightening it where possible.

He removed the standard rear subframe and had panels fabricated to fit between the seat and shocks, then painted it all to match the newly hand-painted frame. He hammered out the seat pan, recovered it and sewed it up. It's a bit soft and not as comfortable as it should be, lacking the high density foam which the shop had promised him. Alasdair finds the laced seat is quite handy for tucking tools and bolts into during roadside repairs…

The engine's pretty much stock and hasn't caused any problems in the six years he's been running it. He's had no mechanical issues; the only problem was when one of the banjo bolts loosened off. When he tightened it the oil line broke.

He's fitted a clutch plate pusher to separate the clutch plates more efficiently, tweaked the carb and added a rather neat new silencer which had to be packed out with adaptors to fit. Annoyingly, it still blows just a wee bit.

The ride was improved by fitting progressive springs to the front end, which didn't cost much. Adding progressive springs on the back too totally transformed it, and the Bullet now handles beautifully. The battery tucks in neatly behind the engine.

An old MZ mudguard was sourced and chopped down, and Alasdair made up brackets to fit. His mum hasn't noticed the straps he pinched from her Christmas hamper, which now cradle the coil and keep his new cloth-covered wiring tidy. The next job is the front rim which needs to be replaced as it's rusting badly.

Alasdair loves the casquette but, because of how it attaches, he found it difficult to swap it over to try alternate handlebars. At one point he had clip-ons but didn't want to fit rearsets, etc. As he said, it'll never be a race bike so he knows he wouldn't be fooling anyone. It proves however that a cheap Indian Bullet can be adaptable, affordable, easy to work on and give years of reliable fun.









ROYAL ENFIELD 700

RE's earlier 700 twins are often overlooked in favour of the later Interceptor, which makes Constellations considerably more affordable – and they're just as much fun.

Owner William knows the charms of Royal Enfields; this is his fourth. His first Constellation was bought the day after he passed his test in the 1960s and used to court his wife. Next came a Super Meteor with a Watsonian sidecar attached. Latterly he restored a 500 Bullet, then this 1959 Connie came along in 2013.

The wheels had previously been rebuilt with alloy rims and the magneto replaced by a Boyer electronic ignition.

Initially unaware that the original Constellation engine had been replaced by a 1959 Super Meteor engine, William suspects it has high compression pistons but hasn't checked yet. The gearbox was reconditioned and he added a Bob Newby belt drive clutch. He tried to get a dent out of the original tank with a pusher a friend made. British Enfield tanks are generally pretty solid and although he managed to move the dent, it wasn't enough, so a new Indian tank was fitted instead. He also fitted a new set of forks, seat and chrome front mudguard.

William took the Enfield to the Manx Rally in 2015 – at the start of the closed road event it stalled and was last off the start grid. With a lot of ground to make up, he unfortunately lost control of the back end and ran straight into the wall at May Hill going out of Ramsay. Burning his leg on the exhaust, William was thankfully otherwise unscathed, but the new forks were bent and the front mudguard crushed.

With the machine repaired, he returned last year but suffered from coil trouble and missed the parade at Jurby. The coil had been overheating, due to its position under the tank above the cylinder heads. Moving it forward solved the problem. He's also fitted a new stand from an Indian Bullet – it is a lot easier to use, putting less strain on your back. There is also an additional handle fitted to the top of the shock absorber which is really handy when you can't access the rear frame rail if you have luggage fitted.

William currently runs three Enfields and likes to keep the controls consistent to allow easy switching between bikes. To this end he has fitted indicators, but finds the wiring an ongoing project in itself.

The downside of William's programme of improvement to his Constellation is that he finds he spends rather a lot of time polishing it. It obviously paid off this year – he won the award for the Best British Bike.

TRAD TRITON

In the early 1970s, Grant worked at a steelworks. Each payday was eagerly awaited as it enabled a visit to Fleming Motors in Glasgow where he gradually acquired the new carbs, cylinder head, barrels, tank, seat and such required to build his Triton.

The 1959 frame is one of the last of the Norton wideline featherbeds, and cost £14 in 1971. Grant completed the build in 1972 with a standard pre-unit Triumph Bonneville T120 engine coupled with a later unit barrel and nine-stud cylinder head.

Grant took his bike to Sweden twice with friends, first in 1973. A few of the lads they met there raced during that week. There were no restrictions, you could go round on whatever you had. The Triton sports two sets of bars. Grant fabricated an alloy yoke with clip-ons so it was easy to take off the high bars and simply swap the levers over for track use.

He's since fitted a late 70s Triumph Trident oil cooler cunningly encased in a modified fork slider and mounted in the old dynamo's position. An engineer by trade, he turned the ends himself. The original magneto has now been replaced by a Boyer electronic ignition.

Sadly young love is fickle. Grant only used his Triton until the end of 1974 when he was seduced by the charms of a Triumph Trident. The Triton remained off the road until last year, but he's now happily enjoying it afresh. It looks every bit as good as it must have in the 1970s, and sports its original glass fibre tank, sign written by hand at the track when he was in Sweden. Grant also has an alloy tank set aside for the future to avoid any issues with ethanol.





DESMO DUCATI 450R/T

After completing the Moto Giro D'Italia on a Ducati Darmah in 2005, Nigel tried out a scrambler. Being rather tall, he immediately felt it really suited his height and decided to try to find a Ducati 450R/T. Barry Jones from Classic Ducati helped him locate this particular machine which had been brought over from America in a container, along with 50 mainly British bikes.

Nigel's aim was to use the 450 for the Moto Giro so the machine underwent an overhaul. It had been using a bit of oil so the desmo engine was taken apart. The valves were worn so it was rebored and a one size over piston fitted. The casings were tumbled to bring them back to their original lustre.

Nigel finds the 33in seat height a perfect fit for his long legs. The four-stroke single has quite a bit of punch and Nigel says it's just sublime on the Italian hills and feels tailor-made for them – although this 436cc model was made specifically for the American market and there are in fact very few in Italy. After participating in three Moto Giro events on the desmo, he found despite never having seen one before, the Italians knew exactly what it was and it attracted a lot of interest wherever he stopped.

The internet has been invaluable in sourcing spares, particularly from America. When collecting all the parts to complete it, Nigel found another frame, swinging arm and associated bits. This enabled him to build a second machine with a springer engine, so he is now the lucky owner of two of these rare machines, which both get used a lot.

Ever since the rebuild, the desmo engine has run really well. It's still on points and he's not had to reset the gaps in 6000 miles. The other spring-valve machine has electronic ignition. Nigel finds there's minimal difference between them. Running more or less the same gearing, they have the same 80mph top end and on a good day with a following wind possibly 90mph! For Nigel's purposes they both have extremely usable, tractable engines. The desmo engine packs slightly more punch but he reckons the springer head is probably just as good.

The 450R/T has a specially designed Seeley-style frame, footrest brackets and sidestand lever. Even the Marzocchi fork lengths are specific to the R/T model, however spares availability is surprisingly good. Even repro glass fibre mudguards and side panels are now available. CBG





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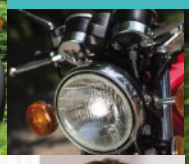
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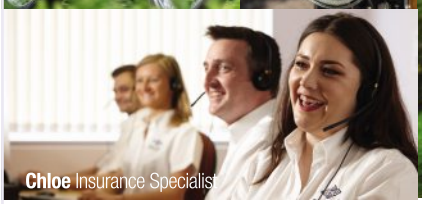


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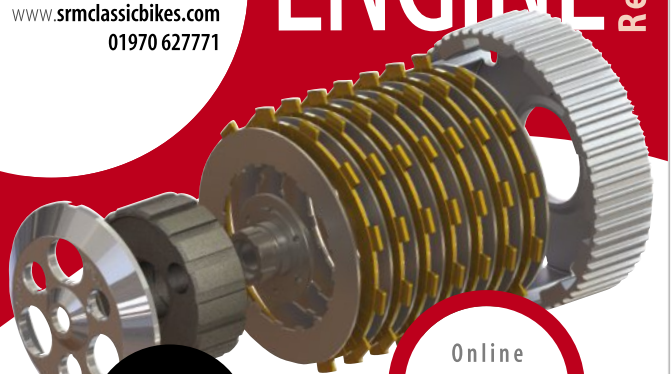
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Triples on track

WORDS & PHOTOS BY FRANK MELLING

THE BEEZUMPH RALLY is one of the best track-based classic bike events in Europe. This year it returns to Anglesey Circuit on Friday, July 14 and Saturday, July 15 – as always under the aegis of the Trident and Rocket 3 Owners' Club. What makes the event very clever, and so popular, is that it combines a friendly and laid-back feel with super slick organisation. That's a hard trick to pull off.

On the Friday, there will be relaxed ride out around Anglesey – and a very pretty route it is too. In the evening, there will be an autojumble of BSA-Triumph triple spares and other parts you didn't realise you needed, with local band Bad Dog providing aural entertainment.

Saturday sees a full day of track action using, unusually, the full international circuit at Anglesey. The good thing about Beezumph is that there is the opportunity for newcomers to track riding to give it a try, at a very steady pace, in the Entry Level class. The class will consist of one track session in the morning and one in the afternoon, both of 15 minutes duration and fully marshalled for the length of the session. The cost for entry is £30 and any solo motorcycle is acceptable. I wish more organisers would do this to encourage first timers onto the track.

There are a further four classes – all the way up to Expert Classics, where the pace is a bit more than seriously brisk. There's footage of the Expert Classic class in action from last year at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VP9ni0Q0QsA

There's also plenty to see and do away from the track. This year's theme is 'Celebrating the Rocket 3' with a static display of interesting triples. Other exhibits will include rare bikes from the London Motorcycle Museum, plus the Racing Triple paddock and George Pooley bringing unique machines – maybe even a V6! Visitors' bikes can gather in the paddock area, and trophies will be awarded for all types of triples in various classes.

In the evening it's party time! A barbecue is included in the rally ticket price and the bar will be open until late. This year the well-known Sixties and Seventies blues and rock band Juicy Lucy will take Beezumphers to a grand finale.

Rally ticket prices are £20 each, which includes entry to the event, camping, rally badge, programme, Saturday barbecue food, and entry to the marquee for the bands, all of which makes the Beezumph stunningly good value. Track sessions, except for the Entry Level class, are £130 and for this price riders get an awful lot of track time. CBG

See beezumph.com

EVENT CLUB PREVIEW

1: You don't need to ride a BSA-Triumph triple to take to the track at Beezumph. Here's our man Melling on his Norton

2: Some rare beasts come out for Beezumph, like this factory-converted dohc triple

3: BSA-Triumph triples look stunning when they're standing still but even better when they are in action. Here is Terry Styles motoring on his Rocket 3


BSA
ROCKET 3

2


BSA
ROCKET 3


BSA
Rocket 3
TRIUMPH


TRIUMPH


BSA
BSA Rocket
CHAMPION
Lockheed
11
NIX PIX
Castrol

3

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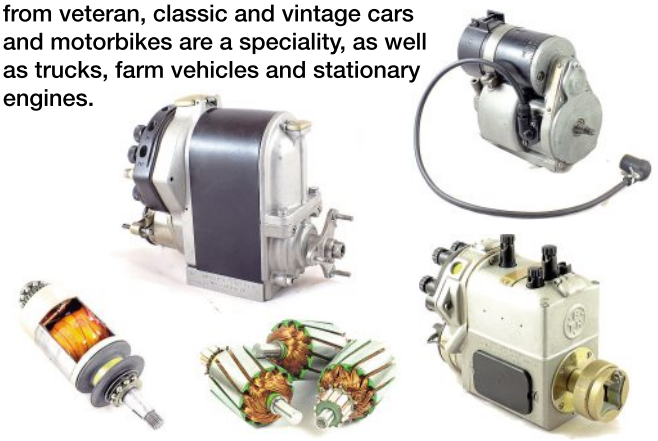


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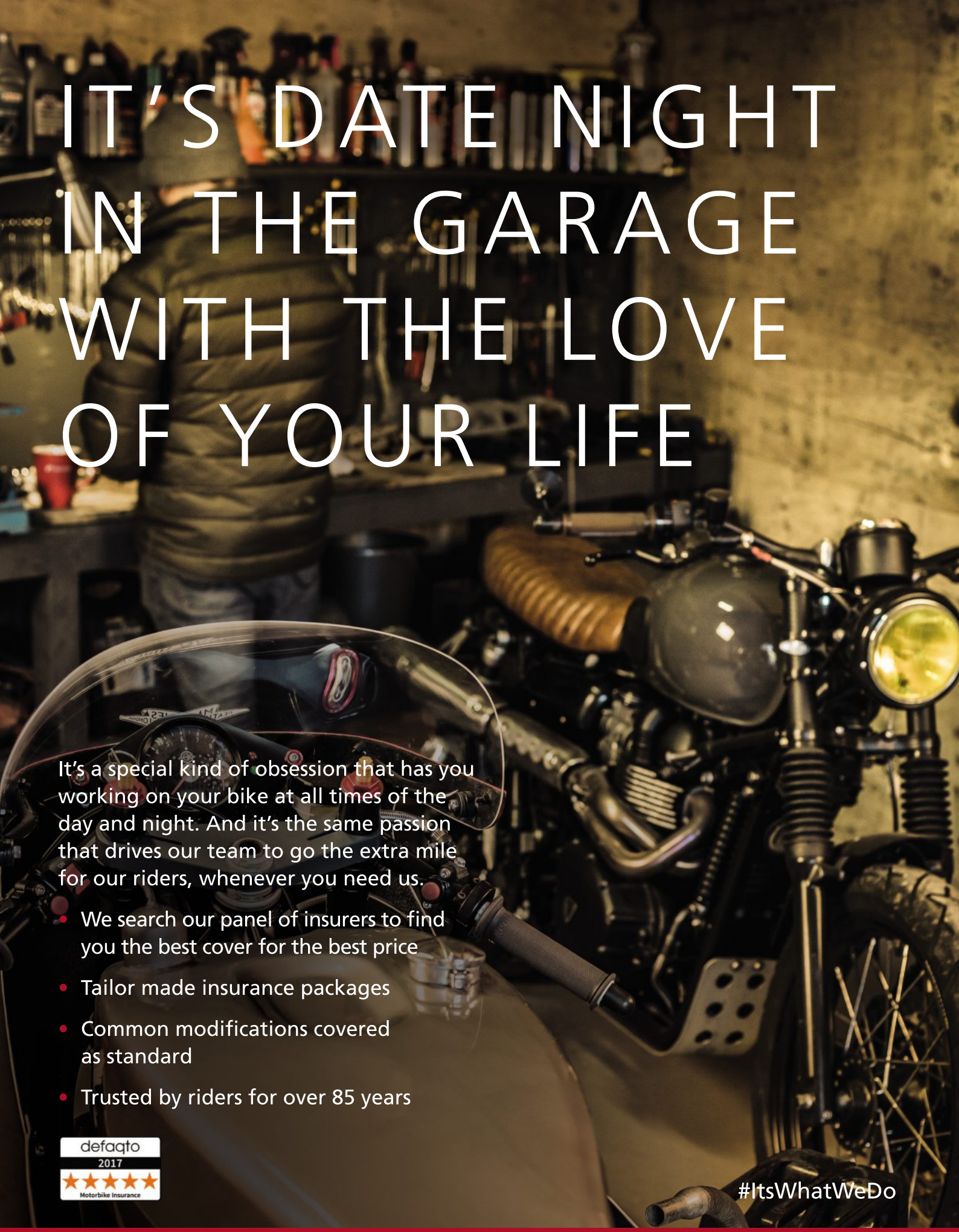


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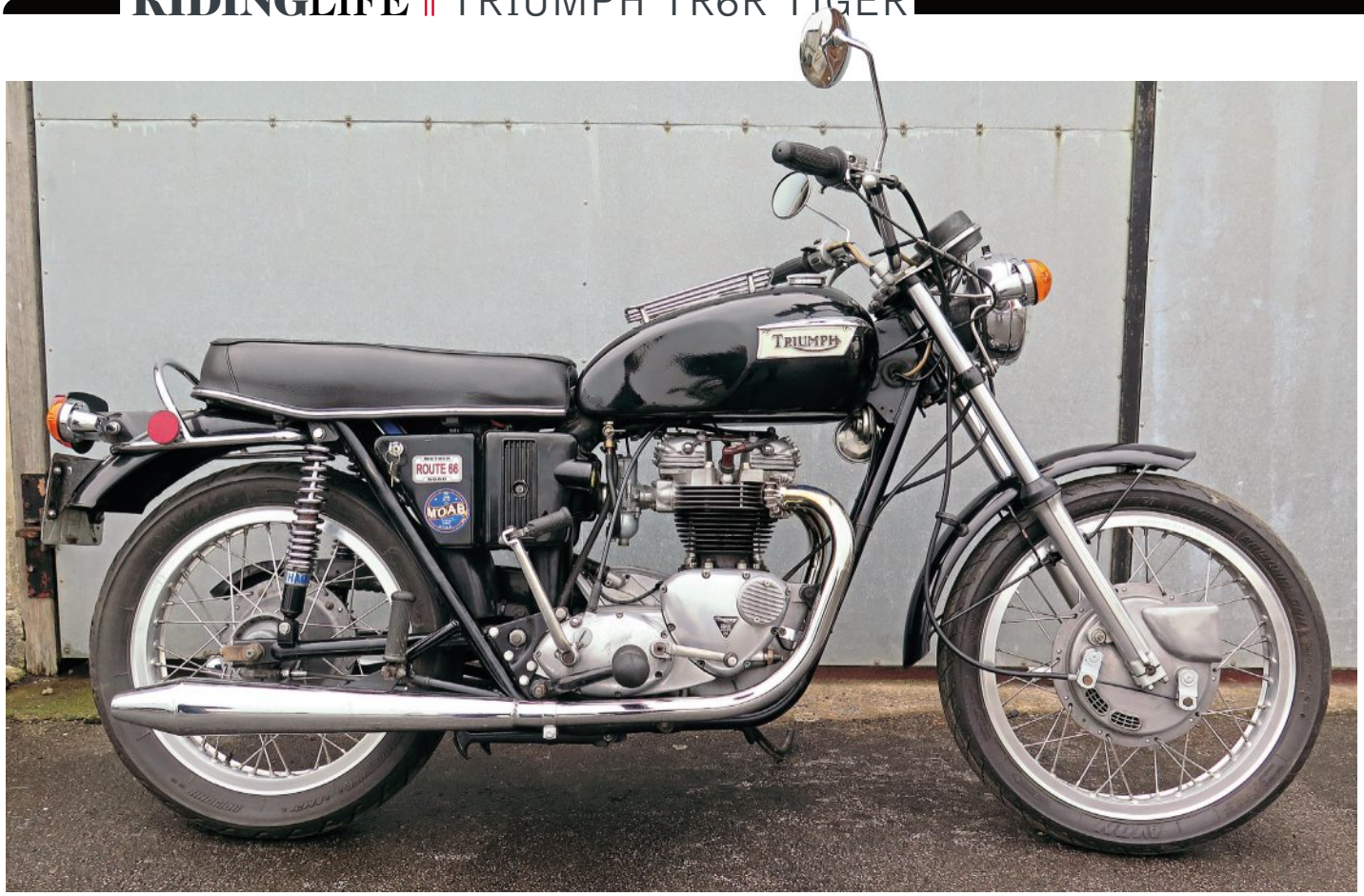
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Timid Tiger?

The Bonnie gets the glory; its single-carb sibling less so. Is this unfair?

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY OLIVER HULME

Above: Overshadowed by the Bonneville, but a better bike to ride according to many, Triumph's TR6R is a good buy

1: As part of the great drive for modernity, Triumph ditched conventional headlamp brackets for neatly bent wire things. Some years later they switched back. Rotating winkers is a familiar syndrome

2: What the single-carb 650 sacrifices in top end it more than makes up for with smooth low-down pull and generally unstressed behaviour

3: Clear clocks, wide bars, lots of clutter. The modern way in 1971, apparently

4: Although suffering from a poor reputation, when they work, the conical hubs work well. The fork likewise. Watch out for wear on the stanchions

5: Some riders might find Triumph's once-upon-a-time trademark tank rack to be a thing of beauty. Others think otherwise

OF ALL THE TRIUMPH TWINS the early Oil in Frame (OIF) models from the Seventies are the most controversial and the least loved. Introduced in 1971, the OIF Triumphs had an unhappy birth. The last of the pre-OIF twins were loved and respected as the pinnacle of the twin's design, so when the team at Umberslade Hall Technology Centre – set up by parent company BSA – came up with their new look they were always going to have a tough job winning hearts and minds. That would have been okay had the design been good, but there were so many problems with the first models that they almost sank the company.

The frame was the biggest problem from the start. The pre-OIF twins were so popular in the US that Triumph had to place adverts in the press apologising for not being able to make enough of them to meet demand. But these glory days came just as the Japanese were getting into their stride. They didn't handle like Triumphs, of course. So what did the design team do? They took away the one thing that Triumph had over Honda and the like – they junked the frame, coming up with a new design that was heavily flawed.

In theory OIF is a good concept, and other manufacturers have followed the same route. But the Umberslade Hall designers messed up. The oil filler had to be mounted halfway down the drainpipe thick frame tube, instead of higher up near the headstock, because the oil foamed in the top tube. This lower location reduced the oil capacity below its optimum level. The frame, using a design that was also used on BSA twins, was said to be too tall for the average rider. When the frames arrived at Meriden the workers found that they couldn't get a complete Triumph twin engine into the frame without removing the rocker boxes. Frantic efforts were made to modify the frame, but by now the flawed bikes were in the showrooms and new owners discovered more faults.

The OIF design had a filter in an inaccessible spot just behind and below the engine where it collected all the crud from the road and could leak horribly. The frames fractured and leaked there too, cracking around the centrestand pivot. Brackets, petrol tanks and mudguards fractured, and with the factory in the midst of both financial and industrial relations crises, owners saw their new bikes languish in workshops waiting months for warranty parts to arrive. Where Triumph once had trouble supplying enough twins,







they now had warehouses full of unsold bikes as buyers walked away.

As the Seventies wore on adjustments were made to the frame and the seat height was lowered, sometimes by the simple expedient of fitting a thinner seat, and eventually by lowering the frame tubes.

But the example seen here shows that Triumph could get it right, even in 1971. This TR6R Tiger 650 has nearly 70,000 miles on the clock and looks ready for a lot more of the same. Although the Bonneville is the Triumph with the reputation for performance, most people who have tried the single carburettor Tiger come away realising it is an all-round better motorcycle. The twin carb bike is tuned for top-end performance, with all the potential mechanical woes that entails. The Tiger, with a lower state of tune, doesn't carry the Bonnie's baggage. The single Amal concentric pumps the fuel into the cylinders at a modest rate and works well with the 360 degree crankshaft twin, with its even firing interval. Apart from the single carb, differences are few: the Tiger is fitted with the same engine and four-speed right foot shift gearbox as the Bonneville.

This Tiger, built in June 1971 and sold on August 1 that year in time for a new 'K' registration plate, has been carefully looked after by an owner who had it for years – before age caught up with him and he found he couldn't start it any more. It's oil-tight as much as a Triumph twin can be and starts first kick from cold after a little tickling of the carb. It is a little more reluctant to start from hot, but get it to top dead centre, give it a firm kick and it'll fire up within two or three goes. The Tiger has a Boyer Bransden electronic ignition under the seat, recommended by many for smooth running and easy starting.

It's the mark of a careful owner that attention has been paid even to parts you can't see. Lengths of garden hose have been split and fitted over the under-seat frame rails and sharp edges. It's got stainless exhaust downpipes and the balance pipe fitted to the stock items has been done away with without any ill effects. Norton Commando pea-shooter type exhausts are fitted, which look better than the stock Triumph pipes – indeed some might think they look better on the Tiger than they do on a Commando.

The legend of the too-tall frame doesn't seem to apply, because a rider of average height – 5ft 10 or 11ins – can sit on it with feet comfortably reaching

PRICE GUIDE
£3500-5500

FAULTS AND FOIBLES
Watch out for frame cracking and oil leaks from the frame near the oil filter. The engine is in a low state of tune and should last well. If a bike is neglected it should be fairly obvious as there isn't a lot that is hidden away. Not a great bike for the short of stature.

ALSO CONSIDER
The 71-73 BSA A65 Thunderbolt is virtually identical to the TR6, apart from the engine and trim. TR7 750s are more plentiful, and Yamaha's XS2 has more sophisticated engineering, though it is heavier and the handling can be suspect.

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BUY IT NOW



This TR6R Tiger is for sale for £4500. Delivery can be arranged. Contact Russell James on 03309 002058 to see the bike near Taunton, Somerset.



Above: High, wide and… you know the rest. Probably one of the most practical of classics, Triumph's Tiger offers a lot for sometimes sensible spend

the ground. The bars are British spec items despite the fitting of a US export type tank painted in non-standard black, and fitted with an aftermarket tank rack. They are good and wide and feel as if they are in just the right place. It seems that if you are the right height a Tiger has as good a riding position as you'll get – despite the allegedly tall frame.

The TR6 has the BSA Group conical hub brakes front and rear, a good-looking item that features a sexy air scoop at the front. Hindsight being a wonderful thing, BSA-Triumph are now castigated by the armchair experts for not fitting a disc brake to their bikes, but it should be remembered that the motorcycle disc brake was a very new and expensive piece of tech, and those fitted to Hondas of the time weren't exactly earth-stopping. BSA-Triumph were trying to standardise parts across their ranges, and had spent a lot of money on the conical hub – ditching the design would have been criticised just as much as keeping it. A poorly set-up conical hub will perform as badly as any badly-made brake, but a bit of care will make all the difference. It should also be remembered that criticisms of the brake at the time were largely down to fade during hard braking and hard riding, neither of which are likely to apply to modern ownership. Those hubs are laced into a good-looking set of aftermarket alloy rims.

Painted mudguards add to the restrained look and although the wire headlamp brackets split opinion, they give the headlight cluster a nice sparse look, as does the fitting of the instruments to individual brackets on the fork tops. Those forks were a new design for 1971 too, with alloy sliders running on hard-chromed and exposed stanchions, and some owners think they were an improvement on the older design. There are period style Hagon shocks at the back. As is traditional, one of the indicators points skyward, a quirk of pretty much every Seventies Triumph fitted with such new-fangled devices.

Despite its well documented faults, the real point of buying an early OIF TR6R is this. Because of its dubious reputation it'll be £2000 or more cheaper than a pre-OIF model, for just as much motorcycle. Chances are it won't have been restored to within an inch of its life.

What you'll get is a fun, honest motorcycle with good handling and good spares availability that you won't be scared to use on the road in most conditions. And that has to be a good thing. CBG



MANUFACTURED: 1971-1973 **ENGINE:** ohv parallel twin **CAPACITY:** 649CC **COMPRESSION:** 9.0:1 **POWER:** 38bhp @ 6000rpm **CARBURETTOR:** 30mm 930 Amal **IGNITION:** 12V coil **TRANSMISSION:** four-speed **CLUTCH:** multiplate **WET FRAME:** Steel tube oil bearing double cradle **SUSPENSION:** Front: Telescopic fork, Rear: Twin shocks with adjustable preload **BRAKES:** Front: 8in conical hub drum, Rear: 7in conical hub drum **LENGTH:** 87.4in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32in **WEIGHT:** 384lb (dry) **FUEL CAPACITY:** 2.9 gallon

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Tribute Twin

What's this? Did BSA build a previously undiscovered prototype cammy A10?

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY PAUL MILES

Above: Look once. Look away. Look back…

1: Neat original Kawasaki design, complete with a rearset conversion which has produced a truly fascinating gearchange pedal. This is what specials are all about of course

2: Seriously neat – and expensive to build – shaft driven ohc design. And the sticker is not entirely accurate, sadly

3: The jury's out regarding whether even a great drum stopper like this late BSA/Triumph 2ls device is an improvement over a modern disc. Whatever: it looks great, no?

4: Lots of people tell us that this looks like a British engine. On. Which. Planet?

5: Handsome retro take on a simple clock layout. There's even an ammeter, presumably to boost that nostalgia thing

KAWASAKI'S MILLENNIAL W650 parallel twin has deservedly carved out a niche in the marketplace as a go-to, easy to live with retro-styled machine. The long-stroke 72 x 80mm 676cc air-cooled motor is very much of classic proportions, the styling evoking the timeless lines of a Meriden Bonneville – possibly to better effect than the Hinckley Triumph twins themselves achieve.

This combination of simple, robust engineering and subtle, understated styling has endeared the Japanese twin to a legion of special builders, professional and amateur alike. The Kawasaki has often been the starting point for a café racer, flat-tracker or bobber project for builders attracted by the relative affordability of the basic machine, especially when compared to the equivalent British classic 650. The W650 also offers the prospect of better garage behaviour and road manners. It's even been known for a particularly nostalgic owner to fit Triumph tank badges and imagine themselves to be straddling the real thing.

There is another group of special builders, though, who like to think even further outside the box. Terry Dobner is one such fellow. When he first laid eyes on the W650, he didn't see a Triumph homage at all, but instead thought it would make the basis for a tribute to one of his all-time favourite machines, BSA's mighty Rocket Gold Star.

The basics are all there of course: air-cooled 650 twin motor, iconic twin loop frame with conventional suspension, but there are a lot of differences to contend with. Dobner reasoned that most, if not all, the parts required to bestow a period look on the 2001 Kawasaki were available as pattern items from suppliers such as the VMCC and online auction sites. A replica petrol tank was procured from India and is of excellent quality. Once hung over the spine of the Kawasaki's frame, however, it became quickly apparent that a lot of work would be required to replicate the timeless lines of the BSA original.

A slim BSA-style dual seat replaced the sumptuous original – this is a café racer, remember, comfort isn't the issue here – and eventually the correct lines began to flow. The heavy original mudguards were replaced with slimmer replica affairs and a stock BSA rear light housing attached. At the front a replica Lucas 7-inch headlamp was wired into place and at the same time the original switches and controls were













swapped out, replaced by pattern items correct for the period.

The front forks were left as found, Kawasaki even fitted them with rubber gaiters from new. The rear shock absorbers were updated to fully shrouded items of fractionally different length to improve the stance of the bike on the road.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Rocket Gold Star (or even a replica) without some of the exciting bits. So the stock, restrictive and heavy exhaust went into the bin, replaced with a lightweight and (much) freer-flowing 2:2 system complete with Goldie 'silencers'. The obligatory clip-on bars were fitted under the top yoke, showing off the standard speedometer and rev counter to best effect. Much deliberation and surreptitious measurement of other bikes went into the footrest placement, before the final 'no going back' moment of drilling into the frame to bolt the pattern BSA-type folding footrests into place.

Many builds would have stopped at that point, as the cost vs reward equation skewed ever more in favour of penury, but Terry wanted the bike to enjoy the best silhouette possible. Try as he might, there were no images he could find of a genuine RGS fitted with a disc brake. A Triumph 2LS hub and plate were sourced at an autojumble and both wheels were rebuilt with stainless spokes and alloy rims. If you read this quickly, making a hub designed for a 1960s Triumph fit a 40-year younger Kawasaki sounds fairly straightforward. Needless to say, it wasn't.

Modifying the side panel to simulate the oil tank of the original, fitting twin grab handles, a replica Altette horn and other sundry small items were routine tasks, if time consuming. The whole machine needed rewiring to suit the new lights and switchgear.

The finished article looks coherent and, at first glance could easily pass as a product emerging from Small Heath nearly 60 years ago. The lines are good, very good, although the front of the petrol tank looks a trifle too high if you're feeling like being hypercritical. Terry agrees, but says you can only spend so long on something, and to have lowered the front any further would have required major surgery to both frame and tank. The rest of the machine is virtually flawless and finished to a very high standard.

It's tempting to fold the right footrest and unfold the kick-starter when the time comes to start the bike. "You know it has an electric start?" grinned the

PRICE GUIDE
£3000-£5000
(for a standard W650)

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Rear mudguard fractures common. Original suspension quite basic; Ikons and Progressive fork springs help. Bevel drive to top end needs regular checks / adjustment (can be done by a home mechanic). A cheap carb tweak cures a flat spot at c3000rpm

ALSO CONSIDER
Kawasaki W800: fuel injected 773cc successor, benefits from more torque at lower revs. Kawasaki W1: the original mid-60s BSA-clone; very rare. Moto Guzzi V7: mod cons and retro style; more characterful motor

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Just as this Rocket Gold Star isn't what it seems, neither is this 'Triumph'. SD Motorcycles of Chesterfield have this 2001 Kawasaki W650 with Triumph badges for sale at £3,995. Contact www.sdmotorcycles.co.uk or call 07717 377146



Above: Many of the virtues, few of the vices, most of the entertainment at a fraction of the cost of the real thing. Sound good?

owner. So authentic is the experience that it's entirely possible to forget that underneath this facsimile of a classic icon lays a thoroughly modern motorcycle. Suitably chastened, you simply thumb the starter and the tribute roars into life, settling to a steady idle like… a modern bike. The riding position is café racer authentic, right down to an almost instantaneous wrist pain and neck ache sensation; just like the real thing.

Unlike the real thing, however, is a featherweight clutch that doesn't go missing in modern, heavy traffic, a five-speed gearbox with ratios that actually suit the inevitable low speed manoeuvring and a growing confidence that the whole plot isn't going to expire at some inopportune moment. Handling is effortless, the Avon Roadriders complementing the chassis perfectly, and even the front brake, considered one of the best available at the time, is adequate, albeit inferior to the stock machine's disc, of course.

Terry reckons the less restrictive exhausts have improved performance and the W650 has motored down the nearby Henstridge airstrip at an indicated 115mph with power in reserve.

For many of us a genuine BSA Rocket Gold Star will remain an unfulfilled dream, with prices in excess of £20,000 being the norm. Even the replicas, using donor A10s, are around half that amount and are, of course, still old motorcycles. Not everyone who admires the style of the iconic RGS would want or need the high level of maintenance such artefacts require. Throw in modern electronics, five speeds and a stain-free garage floor, and the argument for a modern replica becomes stronger. Push-button starting and a build price significantly less than a period replica makes it compelling.

Terry never refers to the W650 as a replica, always his *Tribute*. The fact it was awarded best machine at a local classic show tells its own story. CBG



MANUFACTURED: 1999 to 2007 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled sohc 8-valve parallel twin **BORE / STROKE:** 72mm x 83mm **CAPACITY:** 676cc **COMPRESSION:** 8.7:1 **POWER:** 50bhp @ 5000rpm **TORQUE:** 56Nm @ 5500rpm **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump **CARBURATION:** 2x Keihin CVK34 **IGNITION:** Digital K-TRIC **TRANSMISSION:** 5-speed **FRONT SUSPENSION:** 39mm tele fork **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shock, 5-way preload adjustment **FRONT BRAKE:** 300mm disc, 2-piston caliper **REAR BRAKE:** 160mm drum **FRONT TYRE:** 100/90 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 130/80 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 1465mm **SEAT HEIGHT:** 790mm **WEIGHT:** 195kg dry **TOP SPEED:** 110mph

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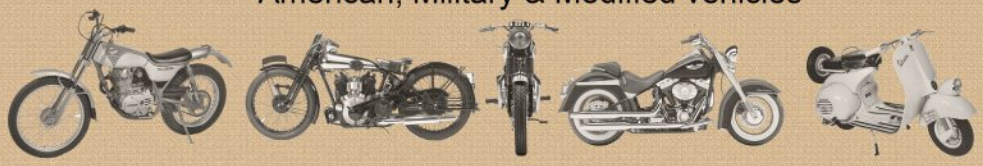
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Next generation

BMW's great leap forward came with the /5 series, like this range-topping R75/5

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY OLIVER HULME

Above: Long-legged and slab sided, the R75/5 has a surprisingly low centre of gravity

1: It's all impressively big, and no other manufacturer's engines look like this

2: The kick-start vanished on later models, but was essential on the first R75/5

3: Splendid deco bar clutter. Aerofoil bar clamps, anyone? The tacho cohabits with the speedo, and the ignition key is its own knob

4: The shaft drive. A big attraction, especially for police users and serious tourists

5: The front brake is a thing of beauty and wonder, but it struggles to fulfil its prime directive

WIRTSCHAFTSWUNDER IS ONE of those splendid German compound words that tell a story. The event *Wirtschaftswunder* – in English it means economic miracle – refers to is the way German manufacturing recovered despite being almost completely ruined at the end of the Second World War, where those parts of Germany's industry that hadn't been bombed into oblivion or destroyed by the defeated Nazi government were taken away to Moscow, Detroit or Birmingham.

Munich-based BMW had been making aero engines and had lost their main car and motorcycle plant in Eisenach, now firmly in the Russian zone. The Munich factory was not allowed to make motorcycles in the first years after the war; BMW were turning out pots and pans using whatever scrap metal they could lay their hands on, as most of the Ruhr valley's steelmaking plant had been stripped and shipped abroad. In 1948 the occupying powers decided that BMW could make motorcycles again, and by 1949 the company had turned out 9,000 R24 singles before being allowed to build their famous flat twins again.

BMW's designers came up with big, heavy motorcycles. Well-engineered, these were little more than updates of their 1930s designs and their basic principles endured until 1969. These high quality Earles forked motorcycles were most commonly bought by connoisseurs and 'gentlemen' motorcyclists, but the main buyers for the solid and expensive flat twins were police forces across Europe.

While BMW was turning out a 1930s design in their motorcycle factory, the car plant was coming up with ever more sophisticated offerings and by the mid-1960s the continued production of motorcycles by BMW was looking shaky. After some soul-searching BMW decided that they would keep building motorcycles and moved production out of Bavaria to a new factory at Spandau in Berlin. This would give the company more space in Munich to build the increasingly popular and sophisticated cars that were making the money. The happy result for the motorcycle division was a new series of machines that gave the range a luxurious feel that matched the manufacturing quality, at a price.

Introduced in 1969, the 745cc R75/5 was the biggest motorcycle in BMW's new line of /5 models that also included the 498cc R50/5 and 599cc R60/5, and it was considerably more expensive than Honda's new













CB750. The new BMW bikes were still flat twins with shaft drive, but that was about as far as the similarities with the old range went, in engineering terms at least. The engine became almost a mirror of the old model. The R69 has cast iron barrels and a lightweight roller bearing crankshaft, the R75/5 model that replaced it had alloy barrels and a heavy crankshaft with plain bearings. The camshaft was relocated from the top of the engine to the bottom. This made room for a very large starter motor on top of the engine capable of starting a small car, though the kick-start remained. All three engines in the range – 500cc, 600cc and 750cc used the same con rods – which were also used in BMW's 2.8 litre six-cylinder car engine.

Apart from the cylinder bore and the carburettors, the engines of the bikes were largely similar. Points and a pair of 6-volt coils replaced a magneto system, and charging was by a powerful 12-volt alternator instead of the generator found in previous models.

The main loop of the frame, made of oval section tubes, bears more than a passing resemblance to Norton's Featherbed. The rear sub-frame is bolted to the back of it and the headstock is heavily braced with a steering damper beneath it. BMW had already tried out a new telescopic fork on the earlier R69 in the US to general approval and the Earles fork that had served since 1948 went the way of all things.

Handling on an R75/5 was good, and although not as fast as the higher performing Japanese and British machines of the day the R75/5 was no slouch, posting high 13 second quarter-mile times and a top speed close to 110mph. It would cruise at 80mph on autobahns and motorways and gave 50mpg – which would have pleased the police forces that kept buying BMWs.

PRICE GUIDE

£3,000-£6,000 depending on spec and provenance

FAULTS & FOIBLES

An acquired taste. Early models have issues with the battery and electric start. Instrument failure, low and high speed stability. Early brakes can be a challenge

ALSO CONSIDER

Honda's CB750 from the same period. The Moto Guzzi V7 of 1969 also has shaft drive and similar riding charms. Norton's Commando Interstate with the big tank for touring is a clear alternative

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The drum brakes had trouble hauling such a big motorcycle to a stop, though careful maintenance and setting up can make a huge difference. The early R75/5 suffered from both low and high speed wobbles, partly controlled by a steering damper. The wobble was partly down to the bike's fairly short wheelbase and the combination of a long travel front fork with a short rear swinging arm/shaft arrangement. By 1973 the last R75/5 had been made longer in a move that improved stability and also meant there was enough room under the seat for a much bigger battery.

This was essential as the earlier battery was not really up to the job of actually starting the engine and would quickly go flat if the Bosch starter was having trouble



Above: BMW centrestands have a different balance point to most, and wheel removal is easy

getting the big pistons moving. The desperation the rider feels as the starter starts turning more and more slowly and the realisation that a kick or bump start might be needed deserves a compound German word of its own.

Bing CV carbs provide the fuel to the engine and need to be carefully balanced. The contact breakers are mounted at the bottom of the front engine casing. This is a logical position from an engineering point of view, but the owner does need to make sure the casing is properly fitted and those electrical bits are not vulnerable to road muck coming up from the front wheel. Fitting electronic ignition is wise. Instruments are basic. The combined speedo/tacho might have looked like a good idea, but the rev counter is often hard to see because the damper knob gets in the way.

Which brings us to the riding position, something that those who are used to other machines of the same period might find problematic. Narrow, almost flat bars with that big humped tank and relatively low seat give a slightly face-forward riding position, unlike high barred rivals of the day. This aids stability, as it puts some of the rider's weight on their arms. This face forward position also takes a bit of pressure off the rider's behind, which is just as well, because for a machine designed as a sports tourer the seat is particularly firm.

Trying a BMW out for a good few miles is a good idea before cash is handed over. In this case, if the relationship doesn't work out, it's not the BMW, it's you. The owner of this BMW decided to sell the bike after two years of ownership because the riding position didn't suit him – he was more used to old British and Japanese classics and Harley-Davidson tourers.

Having been well built in the first place, the bikes are not beyond the abilities of the competent home mechanic. You can get at everything, from the cylinders to the starter motor to the diaphragm clutch and gearbox without having to take half the bike apart first. The gearbox is best described as positive, or clunky, depending on your point of view. Continuity of production, the fact that people don't tend to ride them into the ground and throw them away and a fairly small product line means that there are several excellent parts suppliers dedicated to keeping old Beemers on the road.

Air-cooled BMWs are not to everyone's taste, though they have become increasingly popular with the world's bobber and café racer fans, who have probably snapped up most of the supply of cheap examples. Only the experience of owning one will tell you if the *Schaftwunder* is the machine for you. CBG


Wunderbike.
The 1972 BMW.
BMW

MANUFACTURED: 1969-1973 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv flat-twin **BORE / STROKE:** 82mm x 70.6mm **CAPACITY:** 745cc **COMPRESSION:** 9:1 **POWER:** 50bhp @ 6200rpm **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump **IGNITION:** Battery and coil **CARBURETTOR:** Two 32mm Bing CV **TRANSMISSION:** Shaft **GEARBOX:** Four-speed foot change **FRAME:** twin downtube duplex cradle **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm/ shaft, twin shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** 200mm twin ls drum **REAR BRAKE:** 200mm sls drum **TYRES:** 3.25 x 19 front 4.00 x 18 rear **DRY WEIGHT:** 190kg **TOP SPEED:** 110mph

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Learner's flyer

Royal Enfield built a street racer for learner riders. It was fast, too

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY OLIVER HULME

Above: Whichever way you look at this bike it stuns. One of the first British machines built to flout the learner laws of its day

1: RE's smaller singles are unconventional by Brit bike standards. This side of the engine encloses the drive to the cams as well as the primary drive. Check out the monster engine breather. Despite that, they soon leaked when thrashed and 'owner maintained'

2: The alternator, oil pump and ignition points all live inside here. And that's what factory rearsets look like

3: Teenage dreams, 1960s style. Aired clocks on a 250? Scary stuff. No wonder they've got white faces

4: The brakes were okay by the standards of the day, but the 'bacon slicer' adornments did nothing. Looked good, apparently…

ROYAL ENFIELD'S CONTINENTAL GT was surely one of the most alluring learner bikes ever built.

The GT's predecessor, the Crusader, was described in *The Motor Cycle* as 'spectacular' at its launch in 1956. The Crusader was streets ahead of pretty much anything the rest of the British industry was turning out, and with the soon to be imposed 250cc learner limit, Royal Enfield was in the right place to exploit the change in the law.

The Crusader was a completely new design. The engine was well over-square with a stroke of 64.5mm, a bore of 70mm and a compression ratio of 7.3:1. It was a good performer, but in 1959 the factory responded to calls for more power by introducing the Crusader Sport, upping the compression ratio to 8.3:1, fitting a hotter camshaft, lighter flywheels and a larger inlet valve. A 7-inch front brake, a large chrome tank, chrome mudguards, a rakish exhaust pipe, and inverted standard handlebars all added to the bike's overall sporting appearance.

In 1962 the Super Five, so named because of its five-speed gearbox, was introduced. Compression went up again to 9:1 and the inlet port was made bigger. Stylistically, however, the Super Five was something of a dog's breakfast, with leading-link forks, a huge front mudguard and the kind of semi-enclosed rear end that was only briefly popular – the model was dropped by 1964. What wasn't dropped was the five-speed engine unit, which RE had popped into the new Continental in 1963. The first Continental's most striking feature was a chromed hump-backed petrol tank that would not have looked out of place on a Ducati. Telescopic forks were back, there was an alloy top panel for the speedometer and rev counter, proper ace bars, a flyscreen and narrow mudguards.

And then the Continental GT happened. Looking half Italian and half like a miniature Triton, this was a machine to aspire to. Somebody at RE had clearly been hanging out on the North Circular. Roger Boss, newly appointed sales manager at RE, decided that the factory should produce a café racer of its own. With a claimed top speed of 84mph and 21bhp from that 250cc engine, the Continental GT was an instant hit. It made perfect sense for RE. Instead of spending money on developing a new engine, they could go out and raid the café racer world's shops and build what people wanted. And the factory was up against it by this time – the 250 market was feeling the impact of



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Japanese imports like Honda's sophisticated C72 and Suzuki's T20, so they had to raise their game.

They took all the signature parts of the home-brewed special and added them to their rorty little single. With a bright red glass fibre tank, a flyscreen, a sweptback and noisy sports exhaust, a two-tone dual seat with a racing hump, useless but ultra-fashionable bacon slicer brake cooling discs and rear sets, the Continental GT pretended to be a miniature version of the BSA Gold Star.

In order to launch it, Royal Enfield carried out the 'Top to Tip 1000 mile reliability test'. Roger Boss had decided to prove the speed and reliability of the Continental GT by getting a group of five riders to ride the length of the UK in a day. The riders stopped off at Oulton Park, where Geoff Duke was due to lap the circuit – but ice on the track put paid to that. The effort moved to Silverstone, where race ace John Cooper lapped the circuit with a record-breaking average speed of 73mph. This made the Continental GT the fastest 250 in the UK. Five riders, taking turns at the clip-ons, managed to complete the Top-to-Tip in 22½ hours.

Sadly the run didn't match reality on the streets, where the GT was quickly found to be highly-stressed, leaky and unreliable. Some of the finish wasn't great, and the typically vague British attitude to tolerances didn't help with oil-tightness. Big ends failed regularly, small ends too. Engine oil was stored inside the engine cases in an integral tank – a neat arrangement that made for a compact design, but the location didn't allow the oil to cool. The bulge in the left-hand engine casing hides a curious clutch design that sees the springs mounted outside the clutch basket.

The five-speed box was notchy and full of false neutrals, and some riders swapped it for the Crusader Sport's four-speed arrangement. Yet despite the GT's faults Royal Enfield sold 1,500 of them – it's the look that makes it special.

This 1967 Continental GT was rebuilt in 2004, long after it had been taken apart and stored in boxes following some unknown mechanical catastrophe. The previous owner also had two Crusaders, which had also been taken apart and stored with the GT, with the result that the parts had been mixed up. It took ➧

PRICE GUIDE
£2000-£5000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Not comfortable over long distances. Lubrication system failures can lead to major issues with crankshaft. Notchy gearbox full of false neutrals. Poor turning circle

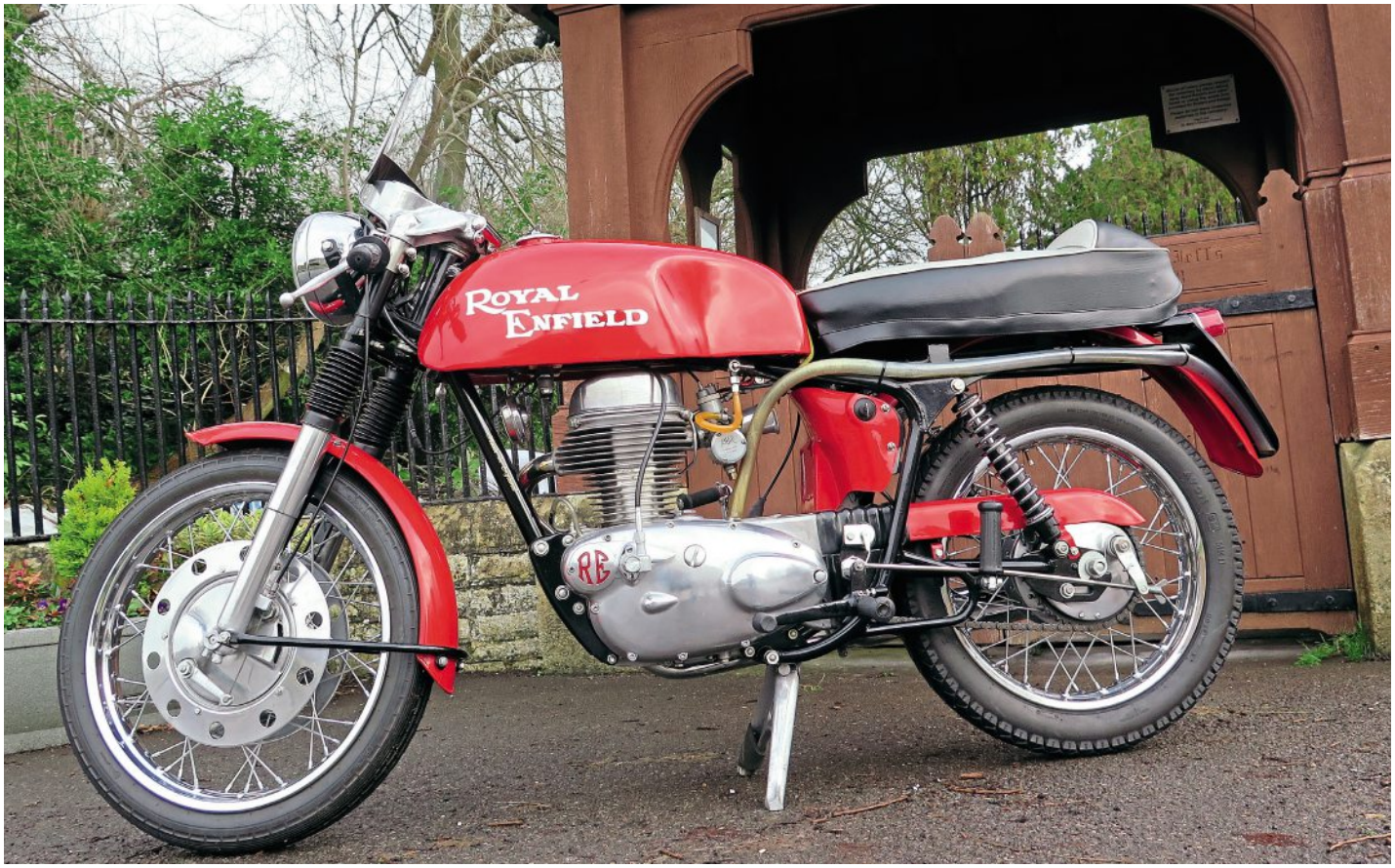
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Above: Stripped back, sporty, light and quick: café racer for the upcoming teenager. And you can still buy a new machine of the same name and approximate styling, too

advice from Enfield specialists Hitchcocks and noted Enfield expert Ray Tew as well as detailed study of the parts books to separate the three bikes. Even then there were plenty of parts missing, and it took 18 months for the GT to hit the asphalt.



MANUFACTURED: 1965-1967 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv single **BORE / STROKE:** 70mm x 64.5mm **CAPACITY:** 248cc **COMPRESSION:** 9:1 **POWER:** 21bhp @ 6500rpm **LUBRICATION:** Dry sump **IGNITION:** Battery and coil **CARBURETTOR:** Amal Monobloc/ Concentric **TRANSMISSION:** Chain **GEARBOX:** Five-speed foot change **FRAME:** single downtube duplex cradle **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** 7in sls drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7in sls drum **TYRES:** 3.25 x 18 front 3.50 x18 rear **DRY WEIGHT:** 312lb **TOP SPEED:** 84mph

Owner Gary Robbins says the Continental GT was built for looks, not comfort. It's been fitted with a few factory-supplied optional extras too, like the Italian-made Tomaselli levers and throttle, just to make a special bike even more special. Gary remains bemused by the use of a huge and ugly plastic breather pipe running from the engine to the very rear of the bike, which does seem excessive but followed racing practice of the day.

The GT starts relatively easily, and though the gearbox is unforgiving, it's fun to ride over relatively short distances. It makes a splendid racket from the sweptback exhaust and isn't too mechanically loud. You soon find that the ground clearance isn't that great, with extremities hitting the ground at fairly gentle angles of lean. Of course, the dramatic shower of sparks that results might suggest that this design flaw was deliberate. Very basic telescopic forks are matched with modern replica oil damped shocks at the back. Brakes are perfectly capable of hauling the GT to a stop in a reasonable distance, while the turning circle is wide owing to the clip-on bars.

The Continental GT was designed to work with five-star petrol, which of course is no longer available. Getting the head reworked for unleaded and fitting a slightly lower compression piston is an option, though Gary says his engine is stock, and he has had no problems with performance using modern fuel with no additives. It's unlikely that anyone will be challenging him to race against their Honda 250 down the bypass today, after all… though it might be nice to think they'd get a surprise if they did. CBG

Chas Mann

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The other 400/4

Alejandro De Tomaso's attempt to take on Japan created an interesting alternative to Honda's CB400F

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: It's double-take time. Yes, this is an across the frame four. Yes, this is a Moto Guzzi

1: Like Honda's CB400F but different. Dell'Orto carbs are much taller than the CB400F's Keihins. And yes, there are four of them

2: Should you need to, there's an opportunity to add a second disc

3: Not an entirely familiar sight to someone about to overtake a Guzzi

4: This was the era of round clocks in square holes, as well as challenging idiot lights

5: The factory thoughtfully provided crash bars in case of emergencies

MOST OF US are familiar with Honda's distinctively styled, iconic CB400F. But who knew that Moto Guzzi launched a rival 400/4 in 1975? When Argentinian industrialist Alejandro De Tomaso bought Benelli in 1971 his team of designers immediately started work in earnest on multi-cylinder four-strokes. Benelli, in common with many manufacturers at the time, were losing sales to the wave of modern Japanese multis and needed to fight back. Two years later De Tomaso bought Moto Guzzi and began manufacturing at the Guzzi factory in Mandello del Lario. The Moto Guzzi 350 GTS and Benelli-badged 500 Quattro were launched shortly after, followed by the impressive six-cylinder Benelli Sei.

The slightly inclined cylinders on De Tomaso's engines could not hide the obvious influence of Honda's CB500F. The Benelli 500 Quattro shared the same 56 x 50.6mm cylinder dimensions as the Honda, while the Moto Guzzi 350 GTS engine had a different bore and stroke to the rival 347cc Honda CB350/4 with 50 x 44mm giving 345.5cc.

These machines were a radical departure from Guzzi's current V-twins and earlier singles but still benefited from Moto Guzzi's typically robust construction and some quality components. They featured strong tubular cradle frames and Bosch electrics with Grimeca drum brakes and alloy wheel rims fitted to both models.

The 350 GTS was followed by the 400 GTS in 1975. The 400 may have shared the same styling as the 350 but the 397cc engine was in fact a scaled-down version of the 500 Quattro, rather than a bored-out 350.

The 400 relied entirely on the Bosch starter motor to fire it up so, unlike the 350, a kick-start didn't feature. As the name implies, the 400 GTS was designed as a smooth sports tourer with easy acceleration, peaking around 100mph. A single front disc was fitted, with mounting points on the other fork leg giving the potential to upgrade to twin discs if desired.

With a different approach to the CB400F's sexy, swoopy exhaust system, the GTS featured twin pipes running down either side of the oil filter – just like the CB350F (while we're here, it's worth mentioning that the 400 GTS uses the same oil filter as Honda's



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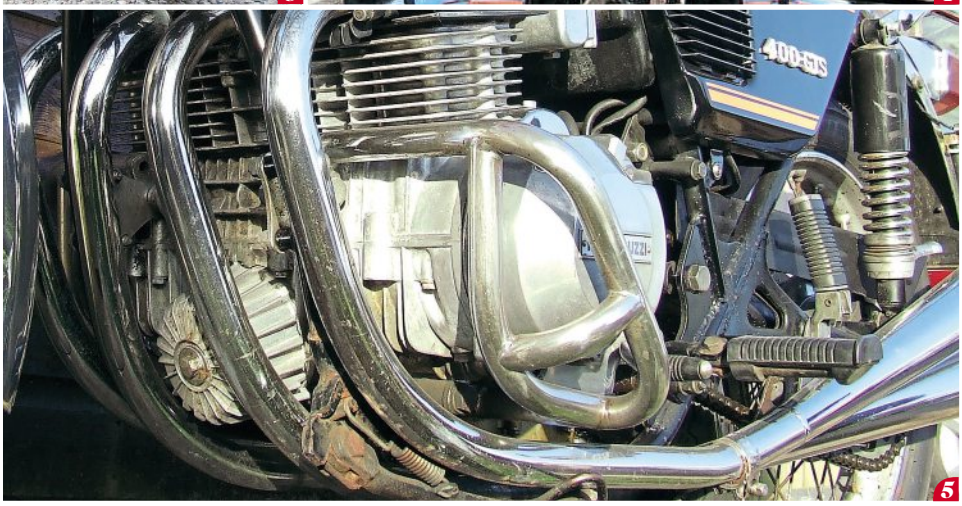

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CB400F and that these are readily available). The downpipes flow through to four separate silencers beneath the Moto Guzzi branded seat, giving it a distinctive appearance from behind. Many riders must have been intrigued by the rather unusual 400 and wondered what it was. The Guzzi and Honda engines look quite similar on first glance, although the GTS engine is inclined slightly rather than straight up like the Honda, and the GTS features a very angular, black painted cylinder block which gives a nice contrast. The clutch casing is ribbed and this is reflected in the styling of the side panels.

The similarities to the Hondas are more than skin deep; hardly surprising as De Tomaso's aim was to challenge the Japanese domination of the market at the time. Perhaps unsurprisingly the 400 GTS also sounds remarkably like Honda's CB400F when running and accelerating, and it even exhibits spookily similar engine rattles at tickover. The Guzzi however had a self-adjusting camchain tensioner with an integral spring. This was a definite improvement on the CB400F camchain tensioner which is the Honda's acknowledged Achilles heel. The Guzzi's gearchange lever is also more straightforward than Honda's linkage. Being a later model, the clocks on this machine are in a rectangular mount with some interestingly arranged warning lights. The earlier ones have the speedo and tacho mounted separately with four warning lights on a plate between them.

The GTS proved to be solidly reliable thanks to its proven Marzocchi forks, Brembo brakes, good quality Bosch electrics. As a bonus it even handled well in the wet, unlike some of its Japanese rivals. Physically bigger and taller than the Honda CB400F, it's a pleasant bike to ride and is very smooth. Easy to start, it handles well with smooth, rapid acceleration. It's very torquey, in fact significantly more so than the 400/4. The GTS pulls more strongly from low revs so you can go into corners low and open it up without changing down. The Guzzi only has a five-speed box rather than Honda's six-speed, but you don't rattle through the gears quite as quickly.

PRICE GUIDE
£2000-£3000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Spare parts specific to this model can be hard to source (helps if you can speak/type Italian). Chrome, pipes and brightwork tend to suffer in British climate

ALSO CONSIDER
Honda CB400F: more readily available, better spares supply, and an icon in its own right. Moto Guzzi V50: a trad V-twin rather than a fab four, many more available and easier to live with. Benelli 500 Quattro: equally odd, slightly less rare, twice the price!

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Above: A four-put Guzzi. Seems entirely … strange, somehow

Above right: It's easy to mock, but all praise should go to Guzzi for trying to be different. Guzzi customers were sadly unimpressed, and Honda buyers still bought Hondas. So it goes…

When the owner bought this 1978 GTS the paintwork was faded by the Italian sunshine and has since been resprayed. Only about 2000 were produced and they were never imported. Very few have subsequently made it to Britain so the bike's a bit of a rarity which causes a lot of interest, discussion and head-scratching wherever it goes.



MANUFACTURED: 1975 to 1979 **ENGINE:** SOHC four-cylinder in-line air-cooled four-stroke **BORE / STROKE:** 50 x 50.6mm **CAPACITY:** 397.21cc **COMPRESSION:** 10.2:1 **POWER:** 40bhp @ 9000rpm **CARBURETTOR:** 4 x 20mm Dell'Orto VHB carbs **IGNITION:** battery and twin coils **LIGHTING:** 12v, alternator **LUBRICATION:** wet sump **CLUTCH:** wet multi plate **GEARBOX:** five-speed **FINAL DRIVE:** chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 260mm disc **REAR BRAKE:** 160mm drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** telescopic hydraulic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** swinging arm, twin shocks **FRONT TYRE:** 3.00 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 3.50 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 1.37m **WEIGHT:** 385lb **TOP SPEED:** 105mph

Some people are reluctant to believe it is an original Moto Guzzi, and think instead that a Japanese engine has been fitted to a small-block twin, so they're a bit bamboozled by it all.

Although it's taller than Honda's four, the GTS still has a reasonably low seat height, making it a comfortable machine for town work or long distance jaunts. It's economical too, returning over 60mpg. Spare parts are obtainable – although you'll have to search a bit for them. On this owner's first long run, the side panel badge fell off, and that did indeed take a bit of sourcing to replace.

Sadly for Moto Guzzi, the 350 and 400 GTS were not commercially successful. Buyers didn't rush to buy a machine so obviously similar to what was already on offer from Japan. The price tag certainly didn't help. In typical Italian fashion the 400 GTS was significantly more expensive than its Japanese rivals, retailing at about £200 more than the CB400F. This Guzzi also didn't seem to find favour with Moto Guzzi stalwarts. Perhaps the four cylinder engine was seen as owing more to Benelli than Guzzi – or maybe it just looked too much like a Japanese machine.

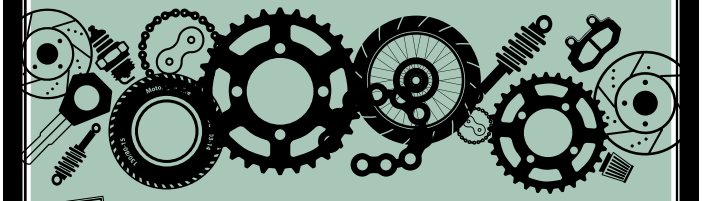
All of this means that these machines are real rarities today – however the prices don't currently reflect this and you can pick one up quite cheaply. The 400 GTS can be a good option for somebody who's looking for a 400 that's just a bit different – but it might be a struggle to find one as they do not come on the market very often. CBG

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Enduring eurosport

Just like the Duracell bunny, Honda's CXs go on and on and on

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: The original CX500 was styled in a somewhat controversial way, in line with the Dream Twins of its time. This is more Super Dream, in its way

1: Aftermarket stainless steel water pipe should last longer than the standard chrome item (hopefully). Plug cap skirts prevent water ingress

2: Linkage bushes benefit from retro-fitted lube nipples. Fit these and forget about seized bushes

3: The carbs are tucked well in, giving space for the rider's knees

4: When the clocks failed, owner Mike found a replacement set in *CBG's* adverts. Neat easy to read dials, these, too

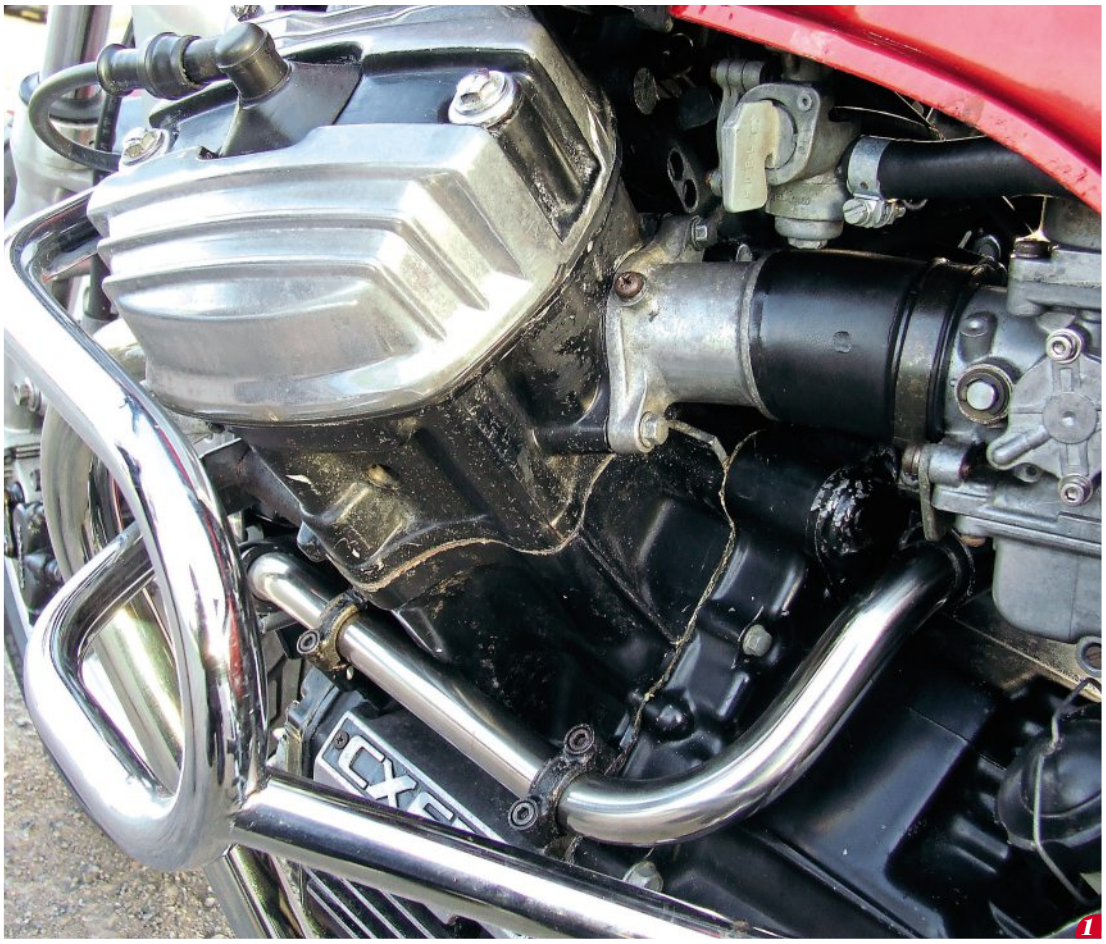
HONDA'S CX IS BACK in vogue in a big way. Once derided as the dispatch riders' weapon of choice, the unfortunately nicknamed plastic maggot has turned and is now highly desirable. Significant numbers of CXs were made and it would appear they've been biding their time waiting for their moment of glory. It's impossible to ignore the new wave of CX powered café racers hitting the streets, with some machines changing hands for serious amounts of money.

Marketed as a long distance sprinter, Honda's CX500 shaft-drive water-cooled twisted twin was specifically designed for high miles and low maintenance. In time-honoured Honda tradition, early CX500s had camchain and tensioner issues, mainly with the manual tensioner which was soon replaced by an automatic item.

The CX continued in various guises including Custom, Silverwing tourer and Turbo options from 1978 to 1983, rising to 673cc for its final incarnation. Honda's fuel-injected CX650 Turbo twin offered an impressive 100bhp, making 140mph possible, whereas the 64bhp CX650 Eurosport was considerably cheaper and easier to live with. There was also a lighter weight CX650 Custom version for America, with a different frame, tank and rather nice wheels.

Featuring a larger bore and stroke than the 497cc CX500 and marginally lower compression, the CX650 Eurosport has loads of low- and mid-range torque. A cross between a tourer and sportster it was a bit niche, although many find the styling more agreeable than some of the other CXs. The V-twin is set at 80 degrees rather than the usual 90, making it narrower (if taller) than its rivals. The heads are twisted in, enabling the carbs to be tucked in and hidden under the tank to give rider's legs more knee space. Keeping things simple but effective, each head has four valves operated by short pushrods.

The Eurosport boasted the same components which promised 'sports handling' on the Turbo. A firm air-assisted fork and monoshock rear end let



1


2


3



4

riders fine tune the ride to suit the riding conditions and their personal preferences. The TRAC (Torque Reactive Anti-dive Control) forks improved cornering and braking, a fork brace added rigidity and an air equaliser kept the forks balanced. A progressive Pro-Link system brought up the rear. The automatic camchain tensioner, shaft drive and transistorised pointless ignition with electronic advance kept maintenance to a minimum.

Mike's owned this CX650 Eurosport for a couple of years since he bought it as a winter hack. The engine was fine when he got the bike although the carbs were really gunked up, needing a complete strip and clean. It had a teardrop of rusty water in the cooling system when purchased, so was thoroughly power washed. The radiator needed to be replaced, the pulley fan wasn't working and the thermostat was a solid lump of rust. The chrome water pipe had rusted away and was leaking, so has been replaced with a nice stainless steel aftermarket alternative. Mike says that like him, the heart of the CX was good – it was just the rest of it that was falling apart!

Mike's covered about 18,000 miles so far and it's really grown on him. Some bikes are like that, they sneak up and get a grip on you before you know it. He owns another ridiculously shiny V-twin but he's now throwing money at the winter hack and it's the one he'll hang on to the longest. Having played extensively on the Eurosport Mike's worked it really hard and is pleased to report that it handles unexpectedly well, in a big, silly grin kind of way. It's really nice to ride, comfy, responsive, neat and tidy for a transverse twin and very importantly doesn't feel too heavy. It's economical too, returning 60mpg.

This particular Eurosport is currently stripped down so the frame, swinging arm and ancillary bits can be powder-coated. Mike found the engine really easy to remove just by undoing a few top and bottom engine bolts. The carbs were left on, then after disconnecting the airbox it was simply dropped onto a dolly and moved out of the way. The finished product won't be concours, but it will still be lots of fun. Improvements include fitting a new Hagon shock and upgrading the brakes with Ben Hill lines.

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FAULTS & FOIBLES
The generator and water pump are known to fail. The mechanical water pump seal is a pain to fix. Monoshock linkage can seize

ALSO CONSIDER
CX650 Turbo: heavier, faster, rarer and pricier with more to go wrong. Moto Guzzi V65: Italian 'reliability' and less knee room for taller riders. Honda NTV650: newer alternative inline twin, another dispatch riders' favourite (also available in Deauville touring trim)

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For a machine once as ubiquitous as those in the Honda CX range there are few that have survived in original condition. Oxford Classic Honda have this well preserved CX500Z for sale at £1,795. Contact them at www.classichondamotorcycles.co.uk or call 01865 326358



Above: Honda's dream – as so often – was to build a bike for the rider who wants reliability, comfort, adequate performance and minimal maintenance. This came very close indeed

Inset: The stock fork is air assisted so you can adjust the settings to suit your own weight and riding preferences

As he prefers a harder ride, Mike's fitting progressive springs on the front with a heavier weight of oil to stiffen the ride up. Unfortunately the tank's badly chipped, hence the cover and plans for a nice alloy replacement. He's fitted a neat aftermarket rack which makes touring easier and a new exhaust system is also on the cards.

Mike loves how simple the CX is and its ease of use. Everything is nicely accessible, apart from the cooling system's mechanical water pump seal which is extremely difficult to get to. It sits on the end of the camshaft behind a cover keeping water out of the oil and vice versa. If it fails there's a weep hole so you can spot coolant dripping down. There's a tell-tale weep if it fails and allows water into the oil or oil into the water. CXs are notorious for this seal failing and it's a pig to fix. Replacing the stator, mechanical seal and camchain is commonly known as the triple bypass. More serious surgery can be called for, a quadruple bypass is possible when the starter clutch springs are replaced too…

The Eurosport runs on Boomerang ComStars rather than the five spoke ComStars on the earlier twin-shock 500s. Unfortunately the Eurosport's monoshock linkage bushes tend to seize up. Although designed to have lube nipples (the position of the nipples is marked on the units) they were never fitted, perhaps as part of a cost-cutting exercise. Luckily there are detailed tutorials online on how to fit them.

Most routine maintenance is straightforward as the bike is really well designed, even the bikini fairing hinges open allowing easy access for bulb changing. The forged aluminium grab-rail features grippy covers at the rear and sides which is a nice touch.

There are several very enthusiastic owners' clubs worldwide and spares availability is good, making the CX650 Eurosport a great option as a usable, affordable and reliable classic. CX500s are more readily available but prices are starting to creep up, probably as a result of the café racer boom. CBG



MANUFACTURED: 1983 **ENGINE:** four-stroke liquid-cooled OHV 80 degree transverse V-Twin **BORE / STROKE:** 82.5mm x 63mm **CAPACITY:** 673cc **COMPRESSION:** 9.8:1 **POWER:** 64 bhp @ 8000rpm **TORQUE:** 45lb/ft @ 6500rpm **CARBURETTOR:** two 35mm Keihin CV carbs **IGNITION:** CDI LIGHTING: 12V **CLUTCH:** wet multi-plate **GEARBOX:** five-speed **FINAL DRIVE:** shaft **FRONT BRAKE:** 276mm twin discs with twin piston callipers **REAR BRAKE:** 276mm single disc with twin piston calliper **FRONT SUSPENSION:** air assisted telescopic with TRAC anti-dive **REAR SUSPENSION:** Pro-Link air assisted monoshock **FRONT TYRE:** 100/90 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 120/80 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 58.5 inches **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6 inches **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31 inches **WEIGHT:** 462lb **QUARTER MILE:** 13.6 seconds **TOP SPEED:** 116mph **PRICE NEW:** £2095

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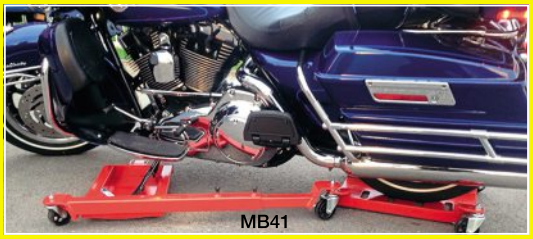
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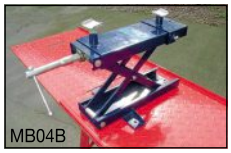



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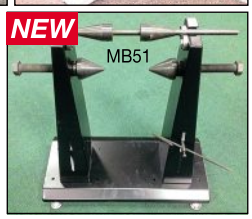

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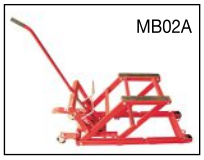

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Velocette man

Meet Jeff Whitworth, a man who knows what he likes…

WORDS BY ROBERT DAVIES **PHOTOS BY** JEFF WHITWORTH, ROB DAVIES

Above: Jeff Whitworth, riding in his novice's jacket. That would be quite a while ago, then…

IF JEFF WHITWORTH were a stick of rock, he would read 'Velocette' all the way through. Not only is he a man who owns two of the finest examples – a 350 Viper and a 1959 500 Venom Clubman – but he is also a dab hand in the garage, and on the racetrack too. He has the cups to prove it.

Many believe that the Velocette motorcycle company was as British as fish and chips, but with a sort of French-sounding title. And they would be almost right, for the company, founded in 1905 by John Goodman and William Gue, the company being originally titled Taylor, Gue Ltd, had its factory in the heart of England, in Hall Green, Birmingham, a midlands city where other small motorcycle firms had their beginnings.

However, the family responsible for what many believe may be the most English of motorcycles was of German origin. For in 1876 at the age of 19, Johannes Gütgemann came to England, married a young lady named Elizabeth – and you can't get more English than that – and settled in Birmingham. They had two sons, Percy and Eugene. Then Johannes adopted the English name John Taylor – but when he was granted British citizenship in 1911, he took the surname Goodman. Glad we cleared all that up.

This small, family company produced some wonderful, mostly hand-made motorcycles, never reaching the size and status of BSA or Triumph, but they were innovators, and their single cylinder bikes won World Championships as well as many other prestigious races. Today, these stylish bikes still have a certain charisma about them, and the Velocette Owners' Club has at this moment some 2,500 members, which suggests that the Velocette is still a very desirable piece of motorcycling history. Just try buying one of their iconic black and gold singles if you doubt the respect they carry.

CBG: So Jeff, tell us about your Venom. You say it was a bit rough when you bought it back in 1984.

Jeff: The bike is a 1959 500cc Venom, at least that's how it started out in life. But I bought it to be



That old 1959 Velocette Venom. In pretty decent condition but still mostly factory spec, as bought by Jeff in 1984



As bought, the bike was complete with the full Venom road gear, including the dual seat, headlight nacelle, chrome rims, handlebars and weighty mudguards





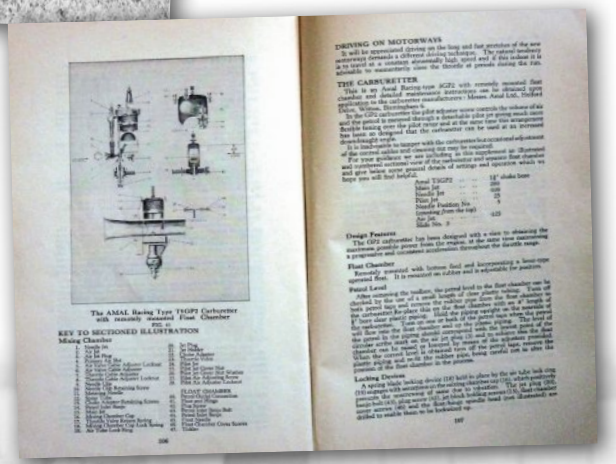
Every Velocette man needs his bible

raced, so I stripped it down and turned it into a replica of a Venom Clubman. And it was a good job that I took the engine apart before starting it up. Some bright spark had tried to do some cleaning with a shot blast kit and had left some of the shot inside the rocker box cover.

I altered the gearbox cluster from standard to close ratio and fitted a Thruxton seat and fuel tank. Velocette as a bike-building company finished production in 1971 – the deadly decade for British bike companies – but one Matt Holder continued to make parts for Velocettes as he had purchased the tooling when they closed.

Above: Much has changed in this stripped-down version, including replacing the brakes, the rims, the lights, and ditching a lot of roadster gear. Also check out the dropped bars and rear-set rests. Tape has been applied to the brush painted (with Tekaloid) parts to avoid damaging the paint

Below: Riding the result: Castle Donington c1986 in the Unlimited Production Race. 209 is a 750 Norton Commando; 222 is Jeff on his Venom with a 500 Triumph behind





RIDINGL LOCETTE FAN







The hubs were modified with scalloped spoke flanges (every bit of extra weight makes a difference when racing), and brake plate vent holes also took a bit of weight away as well as adding a little extra cooling effect to the twin leading shoe brake. An engine breather tube was taken from just under the magneto to a catch tank halfway along the bike, and then another tube from that to just under the rear mudguard. All surplus lugs, such as sidecar lugs and footrest lugs, were also cut off to save a little weight. The iconic fishtail exhaust was raised, and you can just see a through-bolt that mounted it a little bit higher up the frame to give a bit more ground clearance when cornering.

Engine modifications included a bigger carb, so the Monobloc went, to be replaced by the bigger and better GP, for which the inlet port had to be bored out to 1⅜ inch. We worked hard on getting the engine right, even blueprinting it, and this included machining the base of the barrel so that the bore was exactly in the middle and dead-on 90 degrees to the crank. Jeff Dodkin, London dealer and seriously expert Velo man, was very helpful in all of this, as he was a big supporter of production racing, being extremely successful at Thruxton, Castle Combe, Oulton Park and Silverstone. Jeff Dodkin also took his bikes over to Barcelona for the 24 hour endurance races.

The connecting rod was checked and trued so that it also operated at dead centre, to get maximum power from the piston stroke, and the cam followers were reground to Thruxton specifications. A rev counter was fitted because it was injurious to the engine to take the revs past 6,200 – and that was too easy to do, and it's too easy to bend the valves past that point. One little trick we also did to get some extra horsepower was to reverse the baffles inside the exhaust. I also polished the inlet and exhaust ports for better gas flow. That was my racing engine ready for the track.

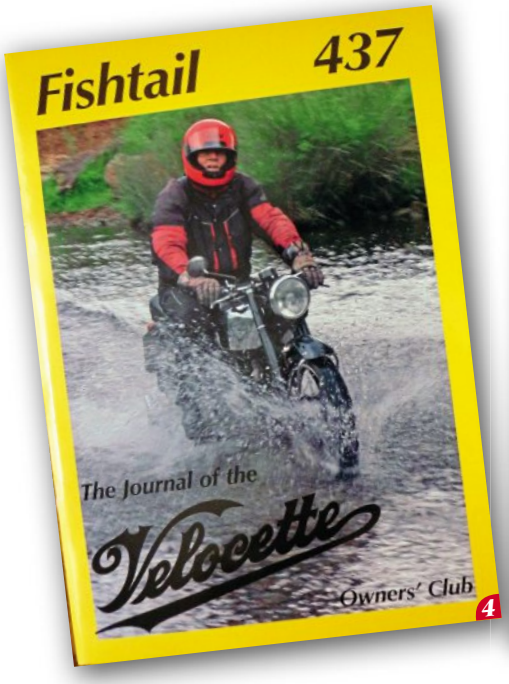
1: The team today, still together, man and machine

2: Jeff on 226 at Alton Park, 1988-ish, dicing with Brian Morris on 189, a 500cc Ducati. Jeff came off at this meet and broke a collar bone

3: Velocettes at Cadwell Park. They include John Shaw (19), Nigel Lines (29), Tony Ainley (42) The blue plates show a 350; yellow plates were 500s. Check out those overhead camshaft real racers, too!

4: Fishtail, the Velo OC's magazine. A serious source of knowledge, understanding and enthusiasm

5: Jeff Whitworth racing his 1959 Venom. Recent ACU regs had introduced the fitting of guards around the back sprocket to prevent body parts becoming entangled during a mishap. We won't call it a crash – much too brutal







I raced that bike for 19 years, and had literally thrown it around the various tracks. Believe me when I say that the bike handles well – certainly much easier to throw around than my more modern Ducati. After all that time, I understood that I was starting to worry about how I was going to take the next bend and I knew that my racing days had come to an end. So I put the Velo back to road trim, and lo and behold, on the very first outing I blew the engine. The bearings literally blew straight through the crankcase sides. That took a bit of repairing, as you can imagine. But as you can see from the latest photographs, the bike looks and handles as good as ever.

Above: Racer, retired

Below: Jeff's rival racer John Shaw at Cadwell Park on a Mk.VIII KTT Velocette 350, mostly like the bike that won the World Championship in 1948/49



CBG: Perhaps you can tell me a bit about the 350 Viper?

Jeff: As you can see, it's just like its big brother the Venom, with most of its features except the later, bigger valve head. It also has a lighter chain and sprocket, lower gear ratios – as you would expect – and a smaller bore exhaust pipe. My racing model is a standard Clubman engine except it has a 1⅝₃₂ inlet. The fuel tank is from a KTT, and the hubs again have been lightened, and Thruxton mudguards fitted. I came sixth in the VOC Arthur Lavington race after a long duel against John Shaw on his Mk.VIII KTT. The Viper was a match for the KTT except for the brakes. I was unfortunately still having to use the standard SLS where the lever came back to the bars after only a few laps – that's my excuse for not beating John, anyway. But it did win the 500 production class race at a very wet Brands Hatch.

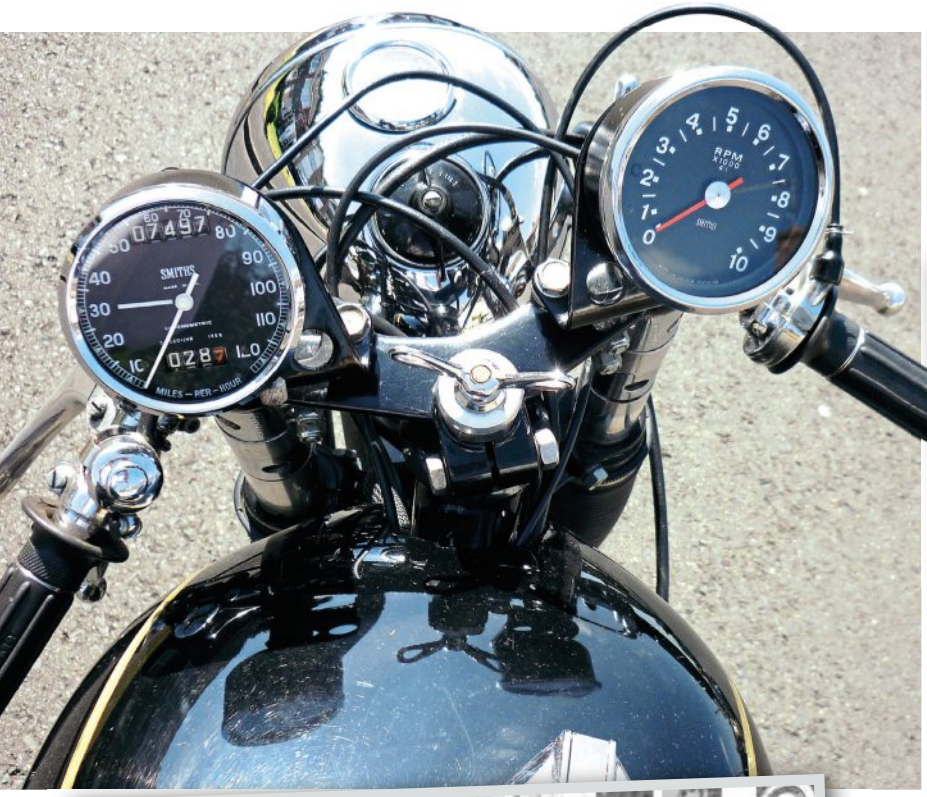
CBG: This seems to be an excellent moment to ask how you got into racing Velocettes?

Jeff: When I was an apprentice at GEC at the age of 16, I went to a meet at Mallory Park. All the famous names of the day were there, including John Surtees, Geoff Duke, Dickie Dale and Bob Mac – these were the exotic stars of racing, you understand, and I just loved everything about it. So, in 1962 I joined the Midland Motorcycle Racing Club, which was then based in Handsworth, Birmingham. Having no money in those days, I started out as a sidecar passenger for Harry Knight. And you don't just sit there, you have a lot of work to do to make sure your driver can do what he wants to.

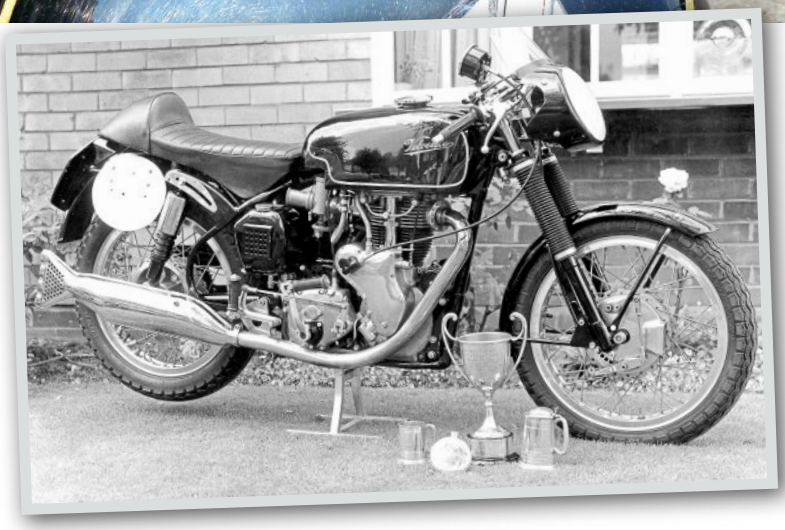
COMPARE AND CONTRAST

VENOM vs VIPER

Jeff Whitworth's other machine: his 350 Velocette Venom

















I then rode with an excellent rider, Morris Tombs, for 10 great years, in the process gaining an international licence. You see you can't do a TT unless you had road racing experience and an international licence, and you couldn't obtain one of those unless you had done really well in national races. So, you had to impress the ACU (Auto Cycle Union), who kept careful records, and get enough points for your licence. To do that, we travelled the country, racing at circuits with famous names like Scarborough and Silverstone, Brands Hatch, Oulton Park, Snetterton and Crystal Palace.

And then Morris came to the end of his racing career. I didn't want to go with another driver. Sidecar racing is a bit like a marriage, where you get to know what the other person's thinking, anticipating their moves. Only then can you do really well and become a good team. So around 1983 I bought the 350 Viper, and I started racing solo. Later I went on to the 500 Venom, and believe me the Velos are great bikes to race. In those days I had no fear, and even loved it when it was pelting down with rain – great days.

Top: This is one serious racing position. Nice clocks, too, and a headlight again for road use

Above: Some of the spoils: picture taken just after Jeff won the Arthur Lavington Trophy at Cadwell Park



At this point Jeff and I took the bike outside for some photos, and I sat on the seat and leaned forward onto those low handlebars, and just felt the racing history and craftsmanship that had produced that thoroughbred ooze from the slim black grips. The Velocette felt almost exactly like the modern café racer I had sat on only a few days earlier. I suppose in truth that the Velocette Thruxton and Venom Clubman can truly claim to be two of the original café racers – and what a pair of bikes! CBG

Above: The way it was. On any Sunday…

2: A road machine once more, the Venom's equipped with luxuries like a toolbox

3: One Velocette engine, as raced. Rebuilt, too. Still fitted with the heroic GP carb, along with rear-set rests and a heat shield for the oil tank

4: The Venom's leading shoe and neatly designed air scoop for effective stopping power







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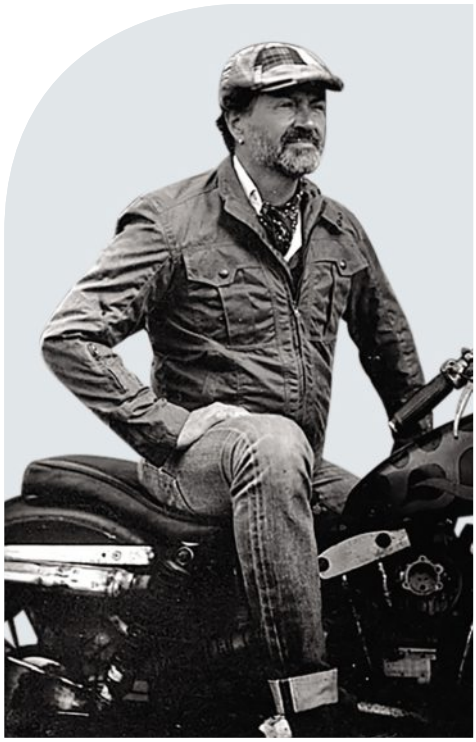
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PAUL D'ORLÉANS

Mexican wheels

Trophy Trails for Triumph

TWO WEEKS SWINGING in a Mexican hammock had me hungry for two wheels, and I peeked out from my sombrero whenever a motorcycle sang its rumbly song. Mexico is a relatively poor country, but a rising middle class (and a lot of expats) means there's an interesting mix of machines on the road. Well, 'road' has a broad interpretation at the bottom of the Baja peninsula; they vary from new four-lane toll highways to incredibly rough mountain tracks with no signage at all, and sometimes getting from here to there means riding on all the above.

There's a picturesque dirt road up the East Cape from the principal town of San José del Cabo to the village of La Ribera, where the pavement resumes. It's a 3½ hour ride along the relatively unspoiled coastline of the Gulf of California (calling it the Sea of Cortez is kinda uncool today), dotted with very expensive/empty homes and the very rough shacks of the goat herders and overseers of the vast, beautiful tracts of open desert, given by the Revolutionary government to local peasant collectives in the early 20th century.

The cops in Baja ride Harley-Davidsons, which we used to see regularly in Cabo, until hurricane Odile mulched a whole lot of windows and furniture in 2014. The 'big box' stores mysteriously lost a lot of TVs and computers during the chaos, but these were discovered safe in the homes of the local police, from the jefe (who had rooms full) on down. *Exeunt vigilii*. Now it's the Federales who patrol, and the military, and some kind of gendarmerie, with uniforms ranging from desert camo to street cop blue, to black with balaclavas, cruising in large pick-ups with .50cal machine guns on top (army), or with several gents out back hoisting big, ugly, full-auto machine guns. This is new. None of the mil-lite patrols use bikes, nor do many spring breakers carry Uzis under their bikinis and flip-flops, but their hard-partying eagerness for nose candy must have attracted a new element to formerly sleepy Cabo. Some tourists rent Harley-Davidsons, but riding between your resort and the rollicking nightclub scene is a recipe for a night in jail, and big H-Ds, as tough as they are, really suck on potholed dirt roads.

Most bikes in the region are strictly utilitarian, small-displacement machines built by Italika, Mexico's largest producer at around 400,000/year. The bulk are 150cc four-stroke singles, styled as scooters or dirt bikes or basic roadsters, and they're everywhere. You can buy one in the checkout line of MEGA (a very large grocery store) for about US$900, just like we used to at Sears or Montgomery Ward in the USA. In the 1950s and 60s, one could buy a nice, modest-performing lightweight motorcycle at a department store, for a very reasonable price. Sears stuck with Puchs for years, after selling rebranded Vespas and Cushmans, but Montgomery Ward had a sexier line-up, selling Wildcats, Cobras, and Fireballs, all Benellis of 125-350cc in various iterations of enduro or street bike. We went absolutely nutso over them as kids, while shopping for our annual start-of-school wardrobe. My poor father (a single dad) suffered an onslaught of boyish squealing as we begged for a motorcycle! Regardless of the fact the oldest of us was only 12.

Today, the Italika's location by the candy rack at MEGA, and their cheapness, makes them very tempting indeed, and they look solid enough. But I'm dubious about their comfort up a mountain road two-up, so I observe what else works here. It seems if you can afford an upgrade on Italika, you leap straight to a BMW GS of recent vintage, which a few locals ride, but mostly expats. They would be eminently competent on anything Mexico throws your way, although they're a bit heavy. I've only seen two KTMs, which seem more suited to local exploration as opposed to long-distance touring. But the two-wheeled kings of Cabo have to be a pair of BMW HP2s I've seen gliding over the dirt like ballerinas. I have a huge blind spot for motorcycles built after, say, 1990, so the noise around the HP2 when it arrived was merely a buzz to me, but I have to say, I could go there.

But I won't, because next February, I'm driving my aging Sprinter the 1400 miles from San Francisco to San Jose del Cabo, carrying inside my 1973 Triumph TR5T, plus one other TBD vintage enduro, which I'll leave in Mexico for annual play dates with friends. Because the Trophy Trail (or Adventurer, depending on your market) has everything I need in an enduro, including vintage appeal. I've already taken it on the dirt roads of California and Utah, and it sounds great, it rides great, it looks great, and it makes me happy to play with it. What more might one want? Sorry, I couldn't hear you.

'Road' has a broad interpretation at the bottom of the Baja peninsula; they vary from new four-lane toll highways to incredibly rough mountain tracks with no signage at all…'

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**

Affordable patriotism

Old age and a shrinking wallet are obliging Williams to figure out if he can back Britain once again

AS SPRING HAS now finally sprung, I have persuaded myself that I have got to downsize and get rid of the bikes that I really can't ride anymore. Or more precisely, ride without worrying that they might not reach their destination without breaking down, discarding bits and pieces, or bestowing me with white fingers and a numb bum along the way. Which, inevitably, means I've got to get rid of the Honda CB400N street-tracker oft mumbled about in this column.

This is both a shame and something of a travesty because it's a unique and although I say it myself (which of course I would) spraucy looking concoction painstakingly and lovingly put together at a cost I daren't even tot up, but we're talking well over three-and-a-half grand. In the process it's had a top end rebuild, all new electrics, exhaust and refurbed carbs, and is therefore reliable, oil-tight and goes like the clappers… well certainly for a 400 twin. So why flog it?

Well, for starters it's LOUD, it has a thinly padded seat and although replete with reasonably effective engine counterbalancers, on a journey of anything over 30 miles it's really uncomfortable to ride. This means my original plan to use it for such larks as to-ing and fro-ing the 165-odd miles from Wales to London is out of the question, and my wilder ambition to ride it to the Wheels and Waves custom festival in Biarritz this summer is rendered ludicrous. But for some young beardy hipster requiring stylish town transport, it'd be ideal. So that's who I hope will appreciate its virtues and buy it – albeit for lots less than it's cost me to make it. That will leave me with my mildly customised Honda VT500 Ascot and my bog stock CBX750-F – both of them far more appropriate to my needs, daily and otherwise.

But as I've mentioned before, in recent times Mr Editor Frank has been gently chiding me for my lack of a cast-iron classic, his less than subtle code for something traditional and, well, British. And I'm now warming to the idea, if only because as I've mentioned before, parts availability is more abundant and economically realistic. And in the same way that the 'tracker is unrealistic as an all-round means of transport, I suppose that I can't countenance an aulde Brit byke that is equally impractical in the Big Picture Dept.

So, suitably prejudiced, I've started searching. And not entirely driven by the whimsy that led me to each of my Hondas, I decided to stick to what little I know, which means Triumph, BSA or Greeves twins and singles, with perhaps a side order of Enfields. Which provides me with a pretty broad canvas. But – given the daft figures being asked and usually not got for customised oldies – not a very affordable one, as even if I manage to get £2500 for the Honda I am determined to not to squander all of that on something British that will inevitably require further expense to keep it going.

Sadly, long gone are the days when you could buy a 750 or 650 Trumpet, a Daytona or even a 3TA for that sort of money, unless it was a basket case/barn find and the same goes for a B44 of any iteration. It is, however, just possible to find a reasonably solid B40 for around two-and-a-half thousand sponds, ditto a C15 – but who in their right mind would dare to ride either for an unremitting 165 miles and back again two days later… apart from Mr Frank? His recently resto'd BSA B25SS is a model I once bought new in its Triumph Trailblazer trim and did indeed ride to, from and around the muddy trails of Wales, but even one of these knocks on the door of three grand if you want a good one, and anything other than a good one is, erm, a bad one.

A Greeves 250 or 350 twin might just make it, but there's all that faffing about with petroil, and having ridden my 9E powered Scottish around Northumberland back in the day I can categorically say Thundersley did not have comfort in mind when it rolled them off the production line.

Also, a trawl through the web and recent magazines revealed that even a decent Greeves costs more than I'm willing to pay, and in terms of longish distance commuting, anything British below 250cc isn't really a runner – probably in both senses of the term.

So, given that I really don't want to mess with an even smaller petroiler, this all leads me to an Enfield single – which means not a British bike at all, but a son of the Raj. However, I have ridden a few and worked on one of these and being an essentially English design, it maybe meets my criteria. Yes, you can just buy a runner for £2500 or even a bit less, but the more recent and leccy start EFI unit 500s seem to be way over the £3000 mark and having bruised my calves and sweated like a pig trying to fire-up the earlier and decidedly recalcitrant models, EFI it really has to be.

Where does that leave me and my overdraft? Answers on the back of a £50 note, care of *CBG* towers please! CBG

'I once bought a new Triumph Trailblazer and did indeed ride to, from and around the muddy trails of Wales, but even one of these knocks on the door of three grand if you want a good one, and anything other than a good one is, erm, a bad one…'

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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PAUL MILES

The modern bike

An alternative for those urgent go-to moments?

I LOVE OLD BIKES. I'm sure you do, too, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this; unless, perhaps you're waiting to have an abscess in your gum lanced and it was either this or a three-year old copy of *National Geographic.* Thing is, with old bikes – okay, with my old bikes anyway – they are not always the most reliable choice of steed. Imagine having to ride cross-country in the dark to get to dear Aunt Ethel's bedside on the off-chance of a million quid inheritance. Would you take your 1953 AJS, sackfuls of tools and a prayer mat, or a nice, shiny, year-old Honda four? Quite.

So we all have them. Not a 1953 AJS, obviously, only a fool would want one of those, but a modern bike for those go-to moments. Even I have one. When I worked in town full-time, the two-wheeled weapon of choice was, and always will be, a scooter. Easy to ride, economical and, crucially, suitable for day-long abandonment in London's overcrowded bike parking spaces.

Originally designated when horses were the number one choice, the bike bays are few in number, small in size and always jammed full of bikes. If you ride anything bigger than a scooter in central London you'll struggle to find a space. As it is, coming back to your machine after a hard day on the lattes you'll likely find it physically manhandled into a different place, locks, alarms and all, to allow room for an even smaller machine to squeeze in. After a year the bodywork will look like the practice rink for Torvill and Dean and it will have been knocked over at least six times. No, London is for scooters only.

But scooters aren't cool, not even the large capacity maxi versions, scarily capable though they are. Nobody will be impressed by the curry hook or underseat storage, let alone the natty hand guards that help keep your fingers warm.

Scooters are out, then, unless it's for the urban commute. Perhaps one of the modern retro bikes? There are plenty to choose from, venerable Royal Enfield singles, modern Triumph Bonnevilles, complete with fuel injectors made to look like Amal Monoblocs and OHC engines that resemble a pushrod motor. The Kawasaki W800 looks even more like a Triumph than a Triumph itself and if you paint a new Guzzi V7 metallic green – from a distance it could be the real thing.

And what do these bikes deliver, exactly? None of them are quite what you might consider to be performance machines. For sure, they can break the speed limit, but mostly they perform in a similar vein to the original bikes they're aping, but with smoother, oil-tight engines, disc brakes and 12V electrics. Whenever I have to ride one I can never quite escape the feeling that I'm an imposter, pretending to ride a proper classic without ever tasting the, admittedly challenging, essence of a classic bike. A bit like the automatic coffee machines in petrol stations, not really good enough and leaving you with a slightly unpleasant aftertaste.

No scooters then, and retros are out, too. What about a huge 'long way North West' trailie? Down these parts, the giant off-roader – usually a boxer twin – is synonymous with the man who has everything, including a supercharged four-wheel drive car. It will be bought with the intention of doing a bit of touring, they always are, but nobody ever does. Just too darn huge for little old me, sorry.

Muscle cruisers – super powerful naked machines with weird styling. A genre pioneered by Editor Frank's beloved Guzzi Centauro. I love these, it scratches the drag racer itch in me. Tootling around on a litre-plus two-wheeled Camaro knowing that you have sufficient urge to overwhelm just about any other vehicle is wonderfully empowering. But, at any speed over 70 for more than 10 minutes and I feel like I'm in a tumble drier. And they're BIG, especially in traffic. Great around town, but not so much on a long run. For that we need a tourer!

Have you seen the size of touring bikes these days? Remember, we're buying new. The engine will be at least 1200cc and festooned with electronic rider aids and communications. The luggage will render filtering impossible and although the literature suggests endless winding roads through cornfields and forests, the reality of living with a 900lb motorcycle is more likely to result in short trips to the chiropractor.

What's left? We've dismissed retros, cruisers, touring and off-road styled machines. What else do the modern manufacturers make that offers more than a sanitised vision of our golden past? Fast bikes, that's what. A modern hypersports machine offers performance good enough to win a grand prix as recently as 10 years ago. They even look just like the bikes you see on the telly at weekends.

A modern 600cc sports machine will easily double the UK speed limit, the litre monsters, nearly three times. So far removed from classic motorcycles in their performance, only they can provide the rider with a totally different experience, unachievable by any sort of classic ride.

I no longer work in London every day. The Fireblade patiently awaits its next outing…CBG

'Tootling around on a litre-plus two-wheeled Camaro knowing that you have sufficient urge to overwhelm just about any other vehicle is wonderfully empowering…'

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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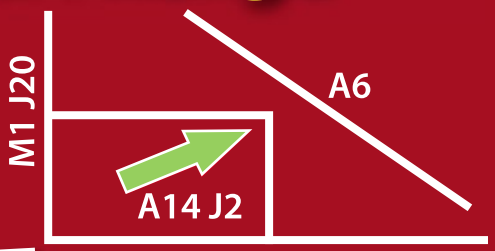
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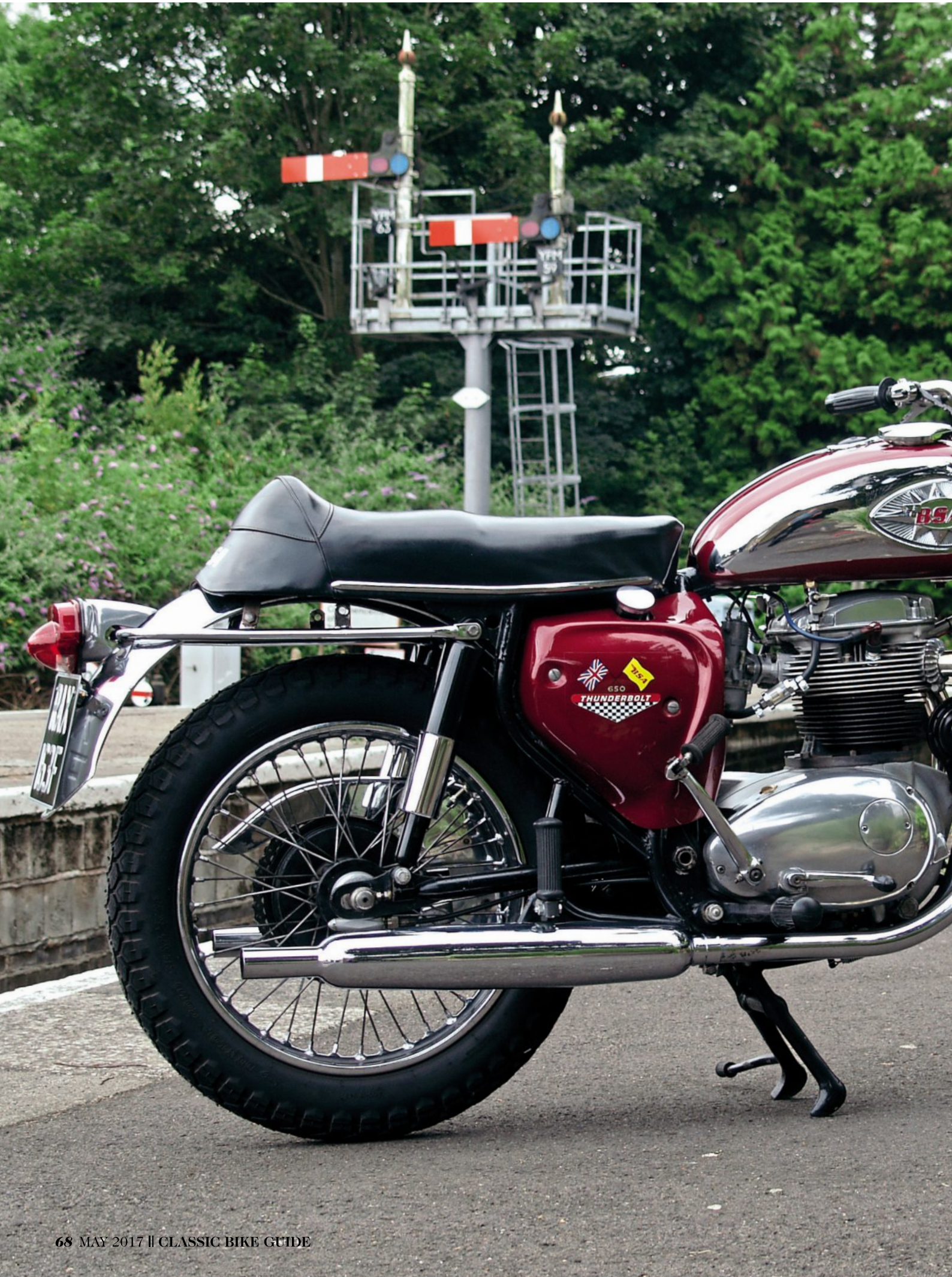
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MOVE INTO THE BOLD WORLD OF BSA

A Thunderbolt from the USA

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY PHIL MATHER

Imagine, for a moment, that it's 1962 and you're in the market for a brand new motorbike. BSA has recently launched its all-new, unit-construction twin-cylinder range and so you're off to the Motorcycle Show at Earls Court, London, filled with anticipation.

In marked contrast to the old bits and pieces design of the earlier A-series twins, BSA has now produced a ground breaking 'power egg' combined engine and gearbox assembly. The crankcases and gearbox housing are cast in one, there's a new cylinder head with high-efficiency combustion chambers, a triple row primary chain, alternator electrics and coil ignition. That's an up-to-date, tough nut of an engine by anybody's standards.

Even leaving home before first light with a ticket for a special excursion coach trip to the Smoke, the queue is already a mile long by the time you get to Warwick Road in Kensington. But you're surrounded by like-minded bike enthusiasts and with the conversation free-ranging between what you can expect to see, what you've ridden in the past and what the industry has up its sleeves for the future, it seems like no time at all before you're through the turnstiles and into the bustle and bright lights of the main hall.

You know the floor plan off by heart – straight down the centre aisle and turn left three stands down – BSA Motorcycles here I am! And there, centre stage is the new 650, your dream bike. Or maybe not. As a fitting successor to the Shooting Star and the Super Rocket you expect something with pizazz, something with zip. Something going boldly intergalactic, not a polychromatic blue dumpling with a wheel on either side.

To launch its new generation parallel twins, BSA had served up a frumpy, obese C15 with a blobby tank and overly-large side panels. The designers had laid their 'power egg' in a rolling chassis that utilised old wheels, mudguards, front forks and headlight nacelle from previous models – and it showed. If that was the best a major player like BSA could do, no wonder the UK market was going into a decline.

Styling wasn't BSA's only own goal on the early A50/A65 Star twins. Poor production standards, quality of components and general reliability all blotted the company's copy book. The new motor had been hustled through development, so the story goes, to beat Triumph's unit construction 650s (launched the following year) to the punch, and the use of a ball bearing to support the drive side of the crankshaft soon proved inadequate once the bikes were in the marketplace. Nevertheless it took the company two

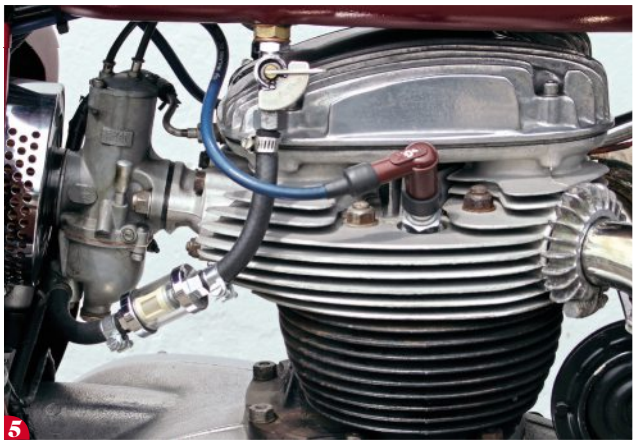












years to come up with an alternative. A shimmed roller bearing at first seemed tough enough to withstand the stresses imposed by a motor from which more and more power was demanded, but it too developed a tendency for rapid wear and ultimate self-destruction.

The great pity is that BSA never used the opportunity of the new engine to revise the question of crankshaft bearings comprehensively and to pension-off the timing side crankshaft bush that had been a feature of the original pre-unit engine for which it was, in its day, an adequate compromise. Not that there wasn't a viable roller bearing alternative sitting on a shelf in the competition shop that would later be a big seller for ex-BSA development engineer Les Mason's Devimead company after the factory closed... but that's the British motorcycle industry for you.

The oil pump was another source of trouble. The body was made of aluminium, which scored easily if anything was picked up in the oil that shouldn't have been, and warped because the design wasn't compact enough to resist the temptation. And the engine vibrated – quite badly when the wick was turned up – which was not good news for a buying public that was becoming more and more performance orientated. Performance? Ah yes, the road test hacks of the period seemed bent on thrashing the Beezas to the redline, and while none of the bikes exploded – as far as I can tell – the brakes were shown to be woefully inadequate and had to be replaced by the earlier single-sided pattern.

The alternator made way for 12V electrics, surely? At a pinch if you can get your head around the concept of two 6V batteries wired in series. Just as well those side panels were capacious. Unfortunately, there were issues with inadequate voltage regulation which resulted in batteries boiling dry, the headlights were dim and the horns feeble. The more you read the more you become convinced that BSA, rather than producing a 'power egg', had produced a 'power lemon'.

Have no fear Brit bike fans, help was at hand

1: Don't be deceived by the shine. This machine is no trailer queen – not at all. After a decent amount of fettling, owner Jonathan Green plainly enjoys a decent thrash

2: Of course, the BSA has a right foot shift. You'll observe that the lever is short. The action is precise and accurate, also

3 & 4: Two sides of an egg. The seriously smooth-looking unit twin engine was a surprise after the Bits Stuck Anywhere range offered previously. But it was also a logical progression from the elderly A10



from an unlikely quarter. While you might have thought the unit twins were dead in the water, the Americans couldn't get enough of them. Either despite the attrition rate, or maybe as a direct result of it, Stateside adrenaline junkies demanded more and more, and year on year production for export rose dramatically to the point where, in 1966, BSA's UK and US model ranges were merged to streamline factory output. Anybody who hankered after a serious roadburner could still satiate their need for speed with a muscle-bound twin carb Spitfire with a big racing tank, dropped bars and a 190mm front brake, but for many, upswept handlebars, a chrome-sided petrol tank, high level exhaust pipes and a passenger grab rail were more appealing.

For BSA, already on the slippery slope to financial meltdown, the need to rationalise the business ran far deeper than simply offering the UK buyer a little more glitz but, save for the few predictable moans about inadequate mudguarding from slim, chrome plated blades and wind fatigue riding at a steady 90mph with Western bars, the general consensus of opinion was favourable. In any case, if you were that bothered you could always get 'the right bits' from specialists such as Eddie Dow, Ian Kennedy or Paul Dunstall.

And so, for the purpose of this story, we have travelled about as far we need go with the BSA A50/65 saga. The Thunderbolt model was introduced in 1966, fitted with 'Lightning spec' single carburettor motor, uprated front forks and an eight inch, single-sided front brake. In common with the rest of the range it had a 'proper' 12V battery. From then on, detail changes became very much the order of the day. Cushion handlebar grips, a rubber-mounted speedometer and a finned rocker box cover were to follow, and subsequently a flip-up petrol tank filler cap and Amal's brand new Concentric carburettor were added.

The bike featured here was in fact built and exported to the US in 1968, and there it stayed for the best part of 40 years. Meanwhile, its future owner

5: Was this the first time that a rockerbox was some kind of style statement? We've no idea, but the finned cover was just a lid; the rockers were mounted on the head itself. No stresses, no distortion and no compulsory oil leaks

6: BSA's unit-construction twin range started out looking remarkably mild, smooth, inoffensive. By the time this Thunderbolt hit the streets, they're rediscovered style









1: Despite the smooth design, the engine could be anything but smooth when pushed hard. So much so that the instruments could suffer somewhat. Rubber mounting comes a lot cheaper than an engine redesign

2, 3 & 4: There's a little mystery surrounding the front end. For starters, BSA didn't chrome their fork sliders, and they didn't fit that 2ls stopper until after this machine had been built and bought. And the mudguard stays look surprisingly Triumph, too. The anchor cable has take-offs for a brake light, and… it's all fun and games, working out the history of an old motorcycle

was embarking on a rite of passage that had the potential of turning him against motorcycles for the rest of his life. Listening to Jonathan Green relate the tale of his earliest motorcycle experience you might wonder why, 37 years later, he's still so passionate about bikes, but I guess the clue is right there at the beginning.

"My interest in motorcycles started when I was 19 and hadn't long joined the Army. Several of my mates had bikes and I would watch them tinkering with their machines in a shelter between the barrack blocks and then riding off on warm sunny evenings, and I thought to myself – 'I'd like to do that, what a fantastic hobby that would be'!"

Being a complete novice, Jon had to start with something small which, in his case, was a 175cc BSA Bantam. Not quite on a par with the big, rorty machines he aspired to, but the lad who sold it to him owned an A65 Lightning so it seemed like a step in the right direction. Independent transport secured, his next move was to make a weekend visit home – home being a small village outside Launceston in Cornwall, about 150 miles from where he was stationed at Middle Wallop in Hampshire.

"The journey turned into a bit of an adventure," recalls Jon who, in retrospect, seems to have been woefully unprepared for anything beyond a trip to the chip shop and back. But back then he was young and fearless and willing to tackle the steepest of learning

curves. He had been making good progress, sailing down the A303 for the best part of 60 miles when the points cover fell off, leaving the contact breakers hanging on the side of the engine. He spent some time looking for the cover with no success, then decided to start pushing. We've all been there at some time or other, before the days of mobile phones and roadside recovery. Fortunately it wasn't long before he came to a garage and even more fortunately, given that it was late on a Saturday afternoon, he found it open.

A helpful chap managed to get the bike running again and Jon resumed his journey, heading west into the setting sun until along came the lesson no motorcyclist ever forgets – he ran out of fuel. Had he passed petrol stations along the way? Had any of them been open? Should he have taken the opportunity to top-up the Bantam's tank when he could and should he have, dare I say it, embarked on his odyssey a little earlier in the day when completing the journey in daylight would have been a bonus?

As luck would have it, he hadn't been pushing for long before a passing motorist stopped and gave him some petrol from a can he had in the boot of his car. But what the Good Samaritan didn't have was oil to make the all-important pre-mix that the Bantam required.

Remarkably, the Bantam covered another 50 miles before the engine stopped dead and the lights went out. Instinctively Jon whipped in the clutch and coasted to a standstill in the pitch dark. He was back to pushing again, but once the motor had cooled he discovered it would start and this time he made it to within yards of a petrol station with an all-night pump before the tank ran dry. He stuffed his one and only pound note into the slot, filled up and set off on (fingers and toes crossed) the last leg of his journey.

"I recall the Bantam going like a rocket up St Stephens Hill on the outskirts of Launceston," he says, blissfully unaware at the time of the mechanical mayhem he was inflicting on the poor machine.

In all, the journey had taken him 14 hours and, unsurprisingly, at six o'clock on a Sunday morning, nobody at home was still waiting up for his arrival. "No one answered the cottage door, so I went to a little horse shed and slept under some straw for a few hours, I was so tired. That was my introduction to motorcycling."

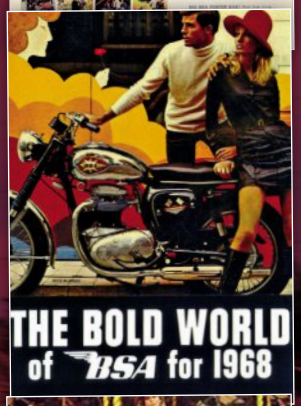
Presumably the ride back to Middle Wallop was a little less eventful, but nevertheless Jon soon sold the Bantam. He did, however, get his full motorcycle licence in time and over the intervening years has owned no fewer that 12 different (and mostly modern) bikes. A blocked fuel tap, a broken kickstarter tooth that jammed the gearbox and a snapped drive chain, all on a Honda CB200 commuter, and a Ducati 906 Paso written off by an errant car driver are his only



THE BOLD WORLD OF BSA



























rueful moments. With a Triumph Daytona Super 111 and a Tiger Sport 1050 in the garage you'd imagine he'd be well settled in the league of the long-haul Continental tourers, but with retirement just around the corner his thoughts started straying to a more laid-back style of motorcycling, to something classic in both looks and performance. Something, dare I say it, BSA?

"A bloke in Wales was selling a couple of bikes from his collection so I went to take a look. He had a BSA Lightning with a slipping clutch and a Super Rocket with lousy brakes so the trip was a bit of a disappointment. Still, I wasn't in a hurry to buy something and I agreed to go back to look at a Thunderbolt, which he said was his personal ride, when he'd got it ready for sale. Would you believe that it conked-out on the test ride and I had to push it back to his place. It had run out of petrol."

The BSA obviously struck a familiar chord with Jon and he ended up buying it. He freely admits that at the time he knew nothing about classic bikes, but he was told that it had been repatriated in 2009 and registered in the UK with an age-related number. It had been updated with electronic ignition, which he knew to be a good thing, but the owner had only covered 600 miles in the last four years, so a thorough check-over was in order. Jon drained the oil and cleaned out the debris lurking in the tank, checked the valve clearances and fitted a new primary chain, drive chain and sprockets which were all well past their sell-by dates.

After an early test ride he noticed oil running down the front fork legs, so he bought a fork seal holder tool on eBay and stripped the front suspension to discover that both the stanchions were badly corroded. Using a photocopy of the factory manual as a guide made the job of fitting new stanchions and seals easy, he says, although he was rather amused at the suggestion of using 'a turn or so of medium twine' around the bottom of the seal holder threads to act as an extra seal.

A damaged and extremely inaccurate speedometer was the next item on Jon's 'to do' list. "The price of a new Smiths speedo was astronomical, so I opted for a pattern one that was compatible with the rear wheel drive gearbox. The rubber binnacle that holds the speedo was badly perished so I got a new one of those

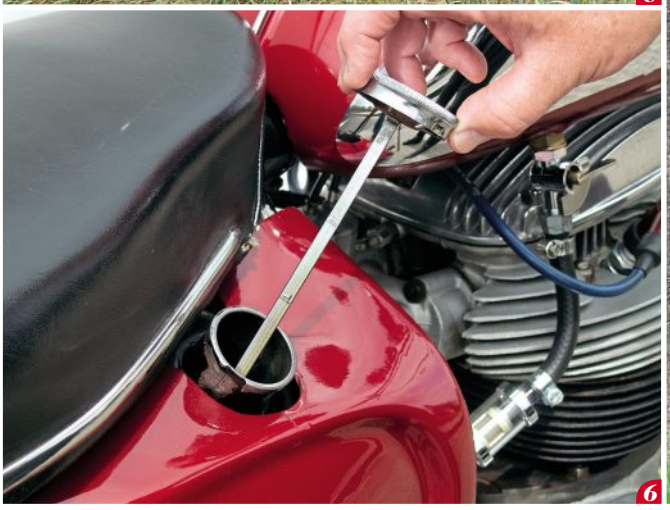
1: Owner Jon has carried out quite a lot of work on his Thunderbolt. Happily, maintenance is not difficult, and access is easy

2: Rear anchorage is provided by a surprisingly good sls brake, the silencers mute the engine – but not a lot, and the hub is of interest to BSA fans, being of the 'crinkle' variety. You so needed to know that

3: Electrics live underneath the cover on the drive side of the bike. The full 12 volts by this stage, and twin coils are operated by twin contact breakers (or an electronic device, as here)

4: An interesting linkage to the brake light switch. Curious…







at the same time, only to find that it wasn't quite deep enough to take the pattern speedo. I ended up having to cut the bottom out of the binnacle which I then riveted to the mounting plate underneath." Whether anybody would notice the difference is difficult to say – Jon certainly made a neat job of it and saved himself quite a bit of money.

A visit to the Bristol Classic Motorcycle Show turned up a new centrestand to replace the original which was bent, and a new chainguard to replace the one that had split where the worn chain had rubbed against it.

Jon was really getting into his classic biking. But almost inevitably, the more he used the Thunderbolt the more niggling problems arose. He had to fit new front wheel bearings and the fork gaiters he fitted when he rebuilt the front end split. This time he dusted the gaiters with talcum powder – 'an old Army trick' that helps prolong their life, he assures me. Unfortunately he has yet to find any talc with the aroma of Castrol R. The petrol tank filler cap seal leaked and the only way to cure that problem was to install a new cap. New oil lines have not, however, overcome persistent oil mist on the right-hand exhaust.

5: Happy man. Great bike. Enough said

6: The oil goes in here – in case you wondered

A new chromed nave plate added a touch of bling to the left-hand side of the front hub, which brings us conveniently to one of those mysteries which may not be a mystery at all depending upon whether you owned this particular machine at some point in its life in the US. According to sales literature of the time, BSA Thunderbolt models were not fitted with Triumph pattern front forks and twin leading shoe front brakes until 1969. Close inspection reveals an in-line front brake light switch in the cable to the right of the steering head, which was a 1969 feature, although the shackle connector where the cable joins the brake arm is more Harley-Davidson than BSA. The fork sliders were never chromed by the factory (think of the expense!) and the front mudguard brackets forward of the forks are almost certainly Triumph. As you can see, nothing looks out of place, but how did a 1968 Thunderbolt (according to its engine and frame numbers) come to be so tastefully uprated?

I'll leave that with you. Coming back to earth with a bump, it was on a ride home from one of those glorious summer evening bike meets that things really started to go pear-shaped. A misfire became progressively

worse until the engine died. With help from a friendly local, Jon found rust sediment in the carburettor and a loose wire on the Zener diode. Together, they managed to get the bike running, more or less, but closer to home the clutch expired. When he removed the primary cover Jon found that the clutch was loose on the gearbox shaft and 10 of the chainwheel bearing rollers were laying in the bottom of the chaincase.

It was now clear that the Thunderbolt 'needed sorting good and proper' as Jon puts it. As well as all the other niggles, he had been suspicious of the charging system from the start – daytime running was fine but the electrics struggled to cope with the ignition and lighting together. He thought the alternator stator might be faulty, but Monty's Classic Motorcycles of Tavistock, Devon, identified a faulty rotor. Rather than patching up one part only to have another fail later, Jon opted for a new three-phase alternator with a modern regulator/rectifier mounted underneath the battery tray, Boyer electronic ignition – and a new ignition switch 'just for good measure'. And since the ammeter needle had fallen off he had a new ammeter too.

In a better world you would think that all Jon's troubles would now be at an end. He'd renewed most of the electrics, scoured the inside of the petrol tank with pea gravel and a pressure washer to remove all traces of rust and even taken the added precaution of fitting an in-line filter between the tap and the carburettor. Sadly, another pleasant evening ride was marred when a spark plug popped out while he was on the wrong side of the road overtaking a line of cars. The plug threads had stripped, but he managed to limp home on one cylinder and have a local engineer fit a Helicoil without removing the cylinder head. Not much later the engine died with not so much as a glimmer of a spark – this time the battery had collapsed internally, so when the new one was fitted it was sat carefully on a bed of foam padding. The clutch meanwhile was craving more attention and began dragging to the point where it became impossible to select neutral with the bike at a standstill. Upon inspection, suspicion fell on the central shock absorber rubbers which Jon renewed, and then an internet search threw up the SRM alloy pressure plate kit with needle roller thrust lifter bearing. "Highly recommended," reports Jon, "It made a massive improvement."

Without wishing to tempt fate, Jon feels that his Thunderbolt now performs as well as it looks. As one of the last unit construction BSA twins built before the advent of the oil-in-frame models, it combines the classic lines of the bikes produced between 1962 and 1970 with the majority of the updates and improvements available – both those undertaken by the factory during the course of development and those that have been introduced by specialist firms since. About the numerous problems he has encountered he is philosophical.

"I had no idea what I was getting into and in many ways I got away lightly. Problems, when they arose, I could fix, and for me that is all part of the experience. The bike is almost 50 years old and for many of those years it wasn't ridden as often as it should have been or maintained as well as it deserved. Regular riding and regular fettling – I reckon that's how a classic bike should be treated, and I wanted a classic bike." CBG



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HOG on the HIGH

History revisited, as Indian and Harley-Davidson battle over market share… and much else

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART **PHOTOS BY** STEPHEN PIPER



What goes around, comes around, and with the resumption of tribal warfare between Indian and Harley-Davidson in 2017 – not only in the showroom stakes, but with full-on factory race teams pitted against each other in the revitalised American Flat Track Championship – it's yesterday once more.

Exactly a century ago the Harley-Davidson Motor Company, which had been hitherto hesitant about going racing, took the fight to its dominant Indian and Excelsior rivals with its all-new Model 17 FHAC 61ci (998cc) eight-valve racer, which made its competition debut at the gruelling Dodge City 300-mile race in 1916 – and won!

This was the equivalent of the Indianapolis 500-miler on two wheels, held on a two-mile oval track in the heart of the Midwest, and Harley's Irving Janke won at a record average speed of 79.79mph, including pit stops, with Ray Weisharr, a fellow member of the Harley-Davidson's factory team known as the Wrecking Crew, third. Incidentally, Indian's purloining of that term to describe its present factory race squad sits right up there for impudence with Ducati stealing the Dirt Sled moniker for its new Street Scrambler from Triumph, which invented the term 50 years ago!







Janke's victory ushered in several years of Harley-Davidson success in US racing, even after the company's management discontinued running its official team after a totally dominant 1921, in which it swept the board by winning every single National Championship category. After Indian's 1-2 finish at the opening round of the 2017 AFT series at Daytona on March 17 with its new FTR750 V-twin, Harley-Davidson fans will be hoping that their equally young XG750R eight-valve racer – derived from the 750 Street roadbike – will be able to improve on Jake Johnson's fourth place in the Daytona TT, the only Harley in the top ten. But it's early days yet, and the Milwaukee-based Motor Company knows just a little bit about how to win races and titles on dirt ovals, after nearly 50 years of dirt-track dominance with the legendary XR750.

Of all the racing motorcycles ever built, any place, any time, the American V-twins of the 'teens and 20s are unquestionably the most rakish. Lean but meaty, lithe but muscular, they simply exude speed and purpose. If ever a bike looked to be doing 100mph standing still, it was the archetype American Racer from whose spindly frame, close-coupled wheelbase and brawny 61ci V-twin engine evolved a species of Superbike that gave almost incredible performance by the standards of the era. Yet at the same time these early Americans possessed a degree of mechanical sophistication quite unmatched by their European counterparts, save for rare exceptions like France's 1912 dohc Peugeot parallel-twin GP racer. Born to race on the numerous dirt ovals and board tracks of pre-First World War America, nurtured in the intense competition between half a dozen rival factories, American motorcycles sported such innovations as countershaft gearboxes, all chain-drive transmissions, four-valve cylinder heads and pump-driven mechanical oiling long before these features gained acceptance on the other side of the Atlantic. Such novelties brought two attributes in their wake: speed and reliability, so that once the message had spread to Europe, US-built bikes, especially Indian and Harley-Davidson, began to reap great success there too in the hands of such star riders as Freddie Dixon, Douglas Davidson (no relation), Claude Temple and Amedeo Ruggeri.

1: Motivator, Harley's first eight-valve engine started a new approach for the company. It took a while to repeat it

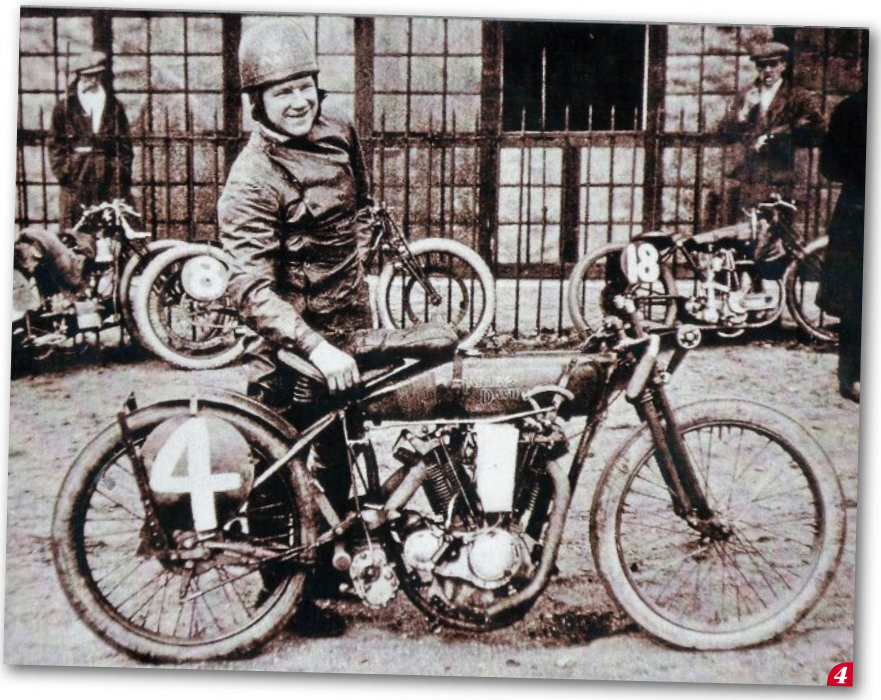
2: The business end. Four overhead valves for each cylinder. Neat and simple operating system, involving long, long pushrods

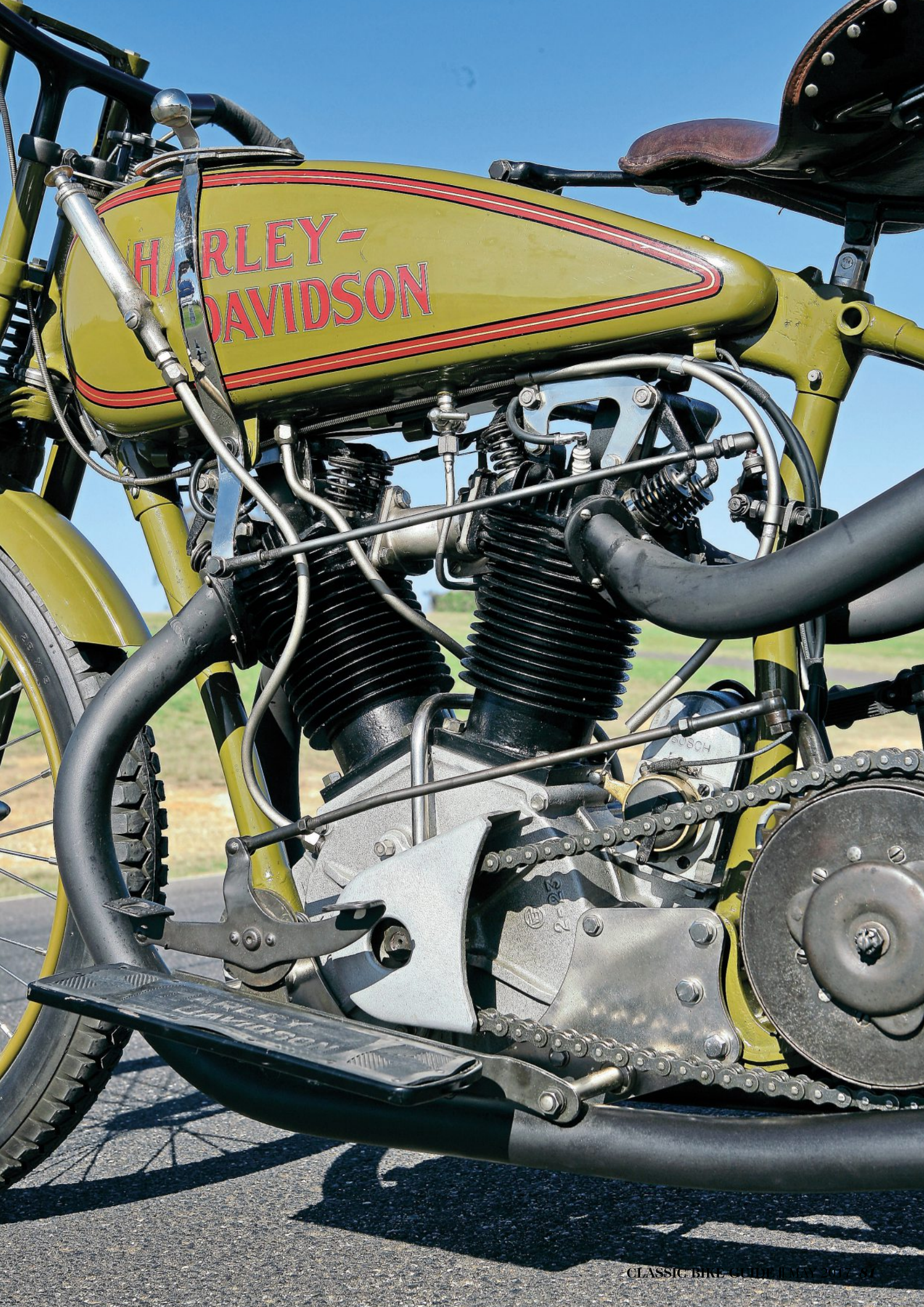
3: A single fuel metering device supplies the two cylinders via this neat manifold

4: Freddie Dixon rode one of these factory racers to considerable success – as here at Brooklands

Right: Maybe early Harley pilots were all left-handed? While the left foot operates the clutch, the left hand operates the gears and the left hand also operated the throttle until the current owner shifted that job to the other side. Oh yes, the left hand operates an oil pump too

Nominally available to privateer riders in compliance with the then governing body FAM's rules that any factory's racing motorcycle had to be offered to the public, the 998cc V-twin eight-valve Harley Model 17 was listed for $1,500 in 1916 – a huge sum at that time that would buy a pretty nice house in Milwaukee, when even Indian's most expensive racebikes sold for no more than $350. It was clearly an effort by Harley-Davidson to funnel these purpose-built racers exclusively to those who would put them to good use, while at the same time paying lip service to the FAM requirement. It's not often that a company deliberately prices a product out of reach of the public, but that's certainly what Harley-Davidson did here. This effectively restricted the eight-valve's circulation to factory team riders and favoured privateers, and also accounts for the very small number of such bikes made between 1916 and




HARLEY-
DAVIDSON
BOSCH



1928 – perhaps as few as 20 but certainly no more than 50, plus around 30 examples of the 500cc four-valve singles, which were effectively the twin minus one cylinder. Only five or six original examples of the V-twin still exist today, making it undoubtedly the rarest and most valuable Harley-Davidson model ever built. Two of them are in Italy, where they were raced with success. The last time one of these surfaced at auction was when a complete and original unrestored barn find sold in Australia for A$600,000 in September 2015 – equating to around US$425,000. Pricey!

There's one more such bike down under, however – although Melbourne property developer Peter Arundel's Harley-Davidson Model 17 was built in 2012 by himself and local vintage American bike guru Lindsay Urquhart from a blend of replica parts and 1924 period components. But there's an added twist to this particular tale – for Peter Arundel is widely recognised as owner of the finest collection of Indian motorcycles in the world today! Basically, the Melbourne-based property developer has at least one example of every single model Indian ever built – so how come the Harley, Peter?

"Well, I'd been collecting Harley eight-valve parts for the last 25 years," came the reply. "It started when I bought a lot of gear off Steven Rudd in America back in the mid-1990s, and then I got hold of an original frame here in Australia, as well as the forks, the wheels and the transmission, which all came from here. The flywheels, the crankcases and the cylinders all came from Steve, so that's how the bones of the bike came together. Because I've always been involved with Indian motorcycles for the last 40 years, it's taken me 40 years to finally ride a Harley-Davidson! But I like eight-valve motorcycles, so I thought – right, let's build an eight-valve Harley as a counterpoint to the Indian eight-valve we've been racing pretty successfully here in Australia, and which I did 158mph on at the Lake Gairdner Salt Flats. So here we are!"

As a change from exercising his stable of Indian models, Peter kindly brought the Harley along to the Broadford track just north of Melbourne for me to experience once again the delights of a bike capable of more than 100mph – but which has no front brake and no rear suspension! In fact, it was a refresher ride after the one I had 30 years ago at the Misano Historic race event in Italy, when I was allowed by Italian collector Renzo Battilani to ride his original 1922 eight-valve Harley, a former holder of the Italian speed record for bikes. Yesterday once more for me, this time!

Milwaukee may not be in cowboy country, but the first sight of the eight-valver tells you it's a two-wheeled version of a Texan cow-wrangler: lean, mean and packing a punch. I was pretty nervous as I clambered gingerly onto its surprisingly comfortable broad leather seat. After all, most bikes that can do the ton nowadays actually have brakes, whereas all that this fire-breathing monster had was a pretty ineffectual band rear stopper, and an ignition control in the left twist grip. At least the Wrecking Crew had magneto cut-outs to help them to slow for turns, and

Above: Alan Cathcart reveals that things are rarely dull when riding an eight-valve 1000cc twin with almost no brakes at all

1: Power from the engine is delivered via a three-speed gearbox. As well as the hand shift, the box wears its selector camplate with pride on the outside

2 & 3: Ignore the very loud noise for a moment. This is the brake: the only brake. Rather than the more modern and more familiar internal expanding type, this is an external contracting brake, in which the friction material is pulled into contact with the 'drum' inside it. It has obvious shortcomings…

4: Rated by many as being among the most effective of pre-telescopic front suspension systems, the Harley's fork is another thing of wonder. Springing is provided by a pair of coils, damping by a scissor-type friction damper, sticking out at the front

5: The secret of the system lies in this, a leading link connecting the front and rear 'legs' and the wheel spindle. The front 'leg' moves against a pair of springs to provide travel. Check out the neat oiler pots and the complete absence of a brake

6: Back then, men – racing men – were certainly of a tough breed















anyway I bet they didn't have to get round corners like Broadford's uphill tight Turn One, or the off-camber left-hander leading onto the pit straight. Plus, I had to grapple with that great American invention, the foot clutch, though Peter Arundel had made one inconspicuous concession to modern times. The steeply dropped handlebars have a twist grip at each end, as original, except that back then the throttle would have been on the left and the ignition control on the right. But he's reversed them so as not to get confused, and I was rather glad he'd done that…

So, time to engage brain and get rolling, for moving off the mark on the Harley requires finesse and application. Press down on the left foot lever to engage the clutch, which locks in place, then select 'low' gear on the vertical hand-shifter lever mounted on the left of the tank, by pushing the metal knob away from you. Next, retard the ignition with the left twist grip, then release the clutch pedal keeper and try to fiddle the throttle in the right twist grip in unison with the actions of your left foot to produce a smooth take-off. The wonder is that I only stalled it once, since at the same time if you want to REALLY accelerate you have to advance the ignition with the left hand. There's never a chance of getting bored riding one of these bikes.

Having barely avoided flunking a getaway at the second time of asking, I briefly considered opting out of trying to get second gear at all, and shoving it straight into top ('high'). At this point the unwritten ethics of track testing intervened, so after shutting down the throttle, I grappled again with the clutch





pedal while moving the gear lever through the neutral slot to second. As the gear engaged with a lurch, thanks to an insensitive boot on the clutch, I was almost shoved off the back of the seat as the Harley leapt forward while I had just a single hand on the steeply dropped bars. Fortunately, the track was empty, so the ensuing wobble that almost took me from one side of it to the other didn't result in a collision, and having gathered myself up I gingerly repeated the process to get into top, but this time managed to avoid any swerve. Whew!

Fortunately, the big V-twin engine is so flexible that it forgave my lack of dexterity in matching foot to hand, and that could probably have remained the sum total of gearchanging I'd had to do during my dozen laps or so on the Harley, if I hadn't opted to get extra practice by shifting down to second ('intermediate') for that tight uphill right-hander after the pits, as well as the tighter, slower turn at the end of the top straight. I also tried taking both of these in top, with the ignition backed right off and the engine seemingly firing about once every two seconds. Then if you advance the ignition via the left twist grip and wind the throttle gradually open, the acceleration in top gear from almost walking pace is pretty incredible by the standards of a hundred years ago. It was also terrifying to begin with, because with the knowledge at the back of your mind all the time that there are practically no brakes, you inevitably develop a sudden paranoia about stopping this runaway two-wheeled train. In fact, provided you don't attempt to emulate

Above: It took a while, but only a century or so later, H-D are once again campaigning an eight-valve twin. This is Davis Fisher racing the XG750R on Sacramento Mile at its debut in 2016

Below: "So I just pull this, stand on that pedal, turn this, move this lever, lift this with my foot while operating the twist grip, and then…" Proud (and brave) owner Peter Arundel attempts a look of unconcern while Alan Cathcart prepares to inflict track mayhem on his motorcycle



Marc Marquez in becoming the last of the late brakers, things work out just fine so long as you shut off the throttle soon enough – though I must admit to begin with I was practically closing down for the next corner as soon as I'd exited the one before…

After a handful of laps I'd discovered the approved technique for getting this potent but primeval package round a turn, so that I was able to speed up gradually, and start using the considerable reserves of performance on tap from that lovely engine. Simply retard the ignition, then shut off while at the same time applying the pretty useless foot brake, give her a brief crack of throttle to get set up nicely for the corner, then swing into the turn. Care must be taken not to lean too far over, for although the 28 x 3 four-ply Commander tyres are of modern compound and manufacture, using the grip they offer to anything like its potential quickly results in grounding the low-slung footboards – which are unfortunately not hinged to prevent disaster, should this happen. Once round the turn, accelerate smartly away while advancing the ignition: with the throttle cracked full open the engine fluttered under acceleration, indicating the carburation was a bit too rich. Otherwise the engine ran very well and was very oil-tight, a credit to Peter Arundel and Lindsay Urquhart who restored it to this delectable state.

Well before the days of their current telephone number values, I owned a Brough Superior SS100 with a Harley-type Castle fork which I rode quite a bit, and I've always contended that this was the best front end design available until the advent of telescopic forks. My ride on the eight-valve Harley confirmed this, for although Broadford's relatively smooth surface is a long way from the unmade roads of 1920s America, or the dirt tracks of the Midwest County Fair racing circus, the Harley steered slowly but positively, with the Springer fork smoothing out the few bumps I was able to find.

The bottom link front end design apparently took some time for Harley designer Bill Ottaway to get right, and according to Floyd Clymer who was one of the first Harley factory riders to race such a bike, he shortened the compression springs to lower the position of the pivot in order to limit fork travel and improve high speed handling. Accelerating hard round Broadford's long left-hander leading on to the straight, I found the Harley tracking even and true. The wheelbase looks to be longer too than on the board racers of the time, which would have improved high speed stability, and along with the 28-inch front wheel, would explain the slow steering.

But that fabulous engine is the real gem. Pumping out a good 60bhp in a bike weighing 122kg/268lb dry, it's not surprising that the machine proved to have enticing performance under acceleration. But the Harley was almost too effective for its own good, and the Wrecking Crew's dominance of US competition such that, after a clean sweep in the 1921 season, the factory soft-pedalled on its involvement with racing. The eight-valve was eventually phased out, and instead of employing this sophisticated and effective design in future years, especially for a spin-off road model, Milwaukee opted instead for the less complicated but also slower pocket-valve machines, later superseded by the relatively humble WR and KR side-valvers. In time the XR750 ohv design restored some degree of engineering modernisation to the Harley fold, albeit with just two valves per cylinder. We had to wait until the 1994 advent of the liquid-cooled dohc VR1000 Superbike for the reappearance of an eight-valve V-twin in Harley colours, this time with double overhead cams rather than pushrods. But although its troubled eight-year competition career did end up siring the V-Rod family of street bikes which debuted in 2001, the lack of acceptance of this non-traditional platform by the Harley faithful characterised this as merely a sideshow to Harley-Davidson's mainstream motorcycle line-up, powered by its trademark 45-degree air-cooled engine format. It's taken until the advent for ➧



Below: It is certainly possible that racing rubber has also moved on since those days of heroism

the 2017 model year of the Milwaukee-Eight – Harley's first all-new motorcycle engine in 15 years, and the ninth motor in the Motor Company's Big Twin lineage – to finally bring eight-valve technology to its volume production air-cooled range of pushrod models.

But in the competition arena, after the venerable Harley XR750's iron grip on US Flat Track title success was finally loosened by the eight-valve Kawasaki's victory in the 2016 AMA Championship series courtesy of Bryan Smith, its domination of this category of racing is now under further threat from its bitter showroom rival Indian and its new FTR750 eight-valver. So it was inevitable that Harley's race department should have turned once again exactly 100 years later to the technical format that set them on the path to competition glory back at the start of the last century – hence the eight-valve V-twin XG750 derived from the 750 Street road bike. History repeats itself! CBG



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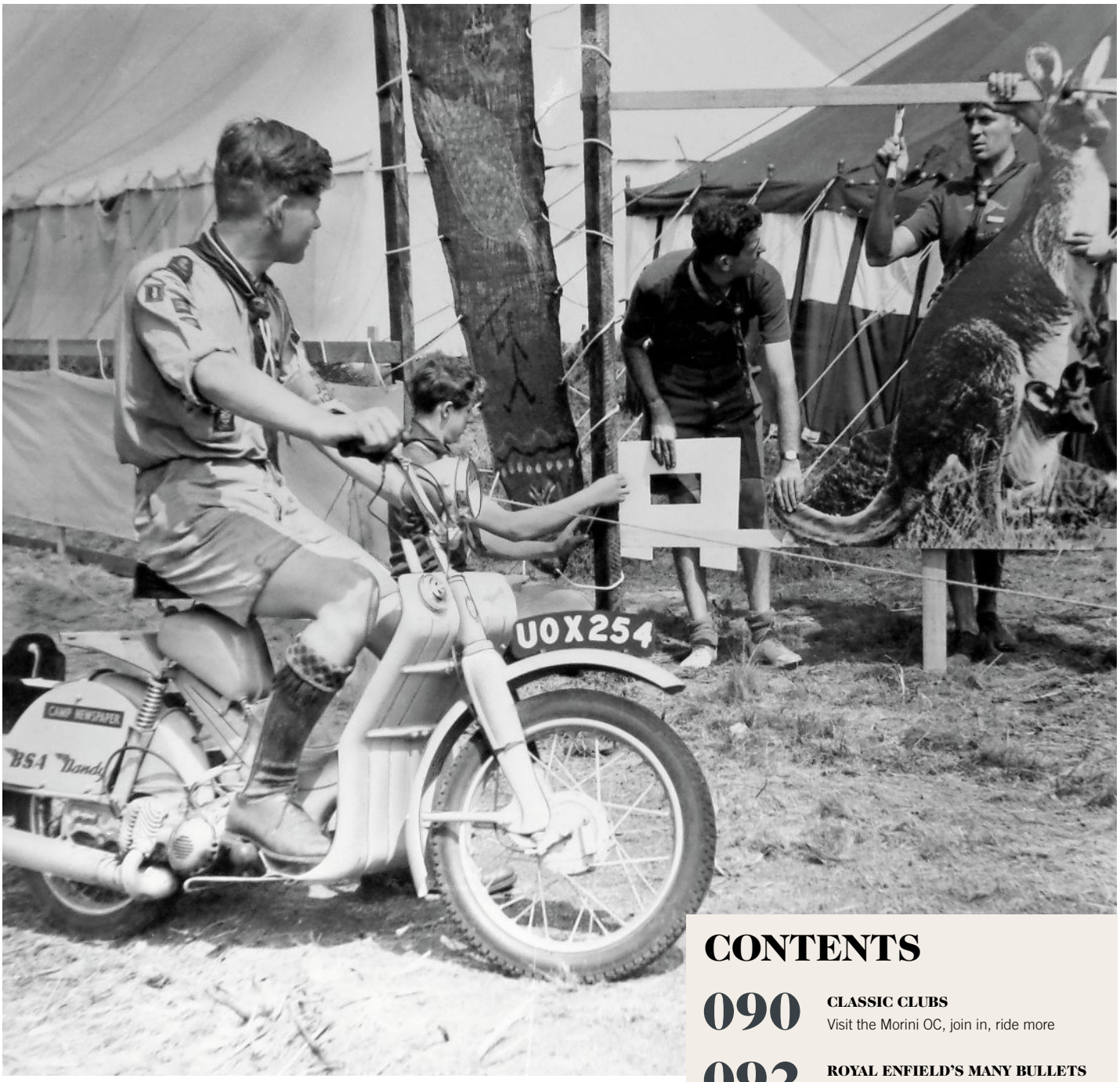
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Above: Summer's coming! Time to drag out those fire-breathing sports machines and go wild across the country. Other approaches are available, apparently

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CONTENTS

090 **CLASSIC CLUBS**
Visit the Morini OC, join in, ride more

092 **ROYAL ENFIELD'S MANY BULLETS**
A big guide to the most affordable old bikes

102 **NORTON COMMANDO BUILD**
Improving an 850, twin discs and an electric foot help

110 **READER ADS**
Here be temptation, lots of it

128 **INK WHEELS**
Co-ordination by Talana Gamah

130 **FRANK WESTWORTH**
Brakes for the brave

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME
PHOTOS BY THE MORINI RIDERS' CLUB

THE MORINI RIDERS' CLUB caters for anyone who owns, rides or simply appreciates these Italian thoroughbreds. The club was founded in 1975 when the 350cc V-twins were first imported to the UK, and the majority of members own one or more of these sporting lightweights. But that's not all – of course – they also have members with early single-cylinder bikes and a number of owners of the modern generation of Morinis are also active in the club.

The MRC pride themselves on being a riders' club, using and enjoying their bikes, and this active approach to marque loyalties is plain to see in the kind of events they organise and attend. The highlight of the riders' club year is the MRC Trackday at Cadwell Park, which takes place on June 22 this year and is always oversubscribed. It's a welcoming and friendly event for riders of all abilities, which is open to all classic bikes, not just Morinis, and offers the chance to improve riding skills and explore a bike's handling in a safe environment.

Various regional meetings and ride-outs are held regularly around the country, letting everyone meet fellow Morinisti from their area, and the annual rally is a fun and relaxed event, held in a different location most years so that everyone has a chance to attend.

Overseas tours are a favourite. Over recent years club members have been to Morini rallies in the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, and this year they are off to France for the French Morini Club's international rally. This promises great riding, great food and plenty of entente cordiale. Two years ago the club celebrated its 40th anniversary with a trip to the Isle of Man, where the riders' club was founded at the Highlander Inn in 1975. This was probably the largest gathering of Morinis ever seen on the Island.

The club produces the informative, amusing and sometimes provocative bi-monthly magazine A Tutto Gas, and membership also provides special insurance rates, discounted parts from Morini specialists, club regalia and merchandise, access to technical information and help, bikes for sale that aren't on the open market and the opportunity to meet a wide



1: Ready for the off at the Cadwell trackday

2: Wall-to-wall Italian jewellery

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range of Morini enthusiasts. Membership costs £26 a year. They have a club stand at most of the major classic shows where people can go along for a chat, look at a variety of Morinis and perhaps join the club. This year they were at Shepton Mallet and the Scottish Motorcycle show in Edinburgh, and will be at Stafford in April and October, as well as Peterborough in October. Members also attend a number of relevant local events and details of these are published in the club magazine.

3: Morinisti gather on the Isle of Man

Mark Bailey from the club told us: "Morinis are at last being recognised for the classics that they are, and the club is thriving as never before, helping to bring enthusiasts together, keeping their Morinis on the road and getting the most from their beautiful bikes."

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ROYAL ENFIELD BULLET CARB MODELS

Banging on

There's a lot of it about. The Bullet, that is...

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME
PHOTOS BY STUART URQUHART, ROWENA HOSEASON, ARCHIVE

Early Bullets aren't so much retro as relics. You can feel the monochrome 1950s built into them

WE HAVE A SERIES of border clashes and tensions between India and Pakistan to thank for the longest-lived motorcycle design in the world.

Two Indian entrepreneurs, K R Sundaram Iyer and his nephew K Eswaran, were in the business of importing bicycles and motorcycles from Britain when in 1953 their company Madras Motors received an order for 800 new Royal Enfield 350cc Bullets for the Indian army.

Launched in the UK in 1948, the Bullet had quickly gained a reputation for solidity, reliability and simplicity – a good combination in those postwar years for soldiers and everyday users alike, and a particularly good choice for an army looking for a military machine to use on the dusty frontier roads of Kashmir.

The Bullets were dispatched from Redditch in kit form and assembled in the Tamil Nadu city of Madras, now known as Chennai. India had protectionist industrial policies, so when the army wanted more Bullets, it was suggested that a new, majority Indian-owned factory be established to build the next batch, resulting in the establishment of Enfield India. Royal Enfield in Redditch dropped the Bullet in 1964, but the Indian factory kept production going. India's protectionist policies prevented the importation of more modern machines, and the Bullet was seen as a high-quality, exclusive brand, much sought-after by the country's middle class. Royal Enfield UK's collapse in the late 1960s caused problems for the Indian company, which had still been using some UK-sourced specialist parts and it cost Enfield a lot of money to set up manufacturing operations for these parts in India.

The first efforts to re-establish Enfield in the UK came in 1977, when a small number of Bullets were brought in by Laverda importers Slater Bros. However, few people wanted to buy a single-cylinder 350cc motorcycle based on a prewar design. The last mass market British single had fallen off the BSA production line in Small Heath in 1972, and there was little desire among the bike buying public for a new example – you could hardly give away a second-hand British single. This was especially the case when far more sophisticated products from Japanese makers were flooding the market, and if you were looking for a utilitarian motorcycle a cheaper MZ, Jawa/CZ or Cossack could fill that void. Bike magazine was kinder than most, describing the imported Bullet as a 'longevity icon' in a road test at the end of that year.

Imports stuttered and stopped a few years later, only for the 350 Bullet to return in 1986, by which time a touch of nostalgia had set in and riders started to hanker after a motorcycle with a bit of British class, but hadn't been worn out by a series of cack-handed owners.


ENFIELD

Above: First the Enfield was Royal, then it wasn't. Then, a little later, it was again. Early four-speed Bullets were offered in several trims down the years, although they are all the same basic bike, and many parts will fit many models. Mostly

Below: Relatively cheap and consistently cheerful. Both of these are good points

1: Relatively rare in the UK today, but very common in other markets, is the basic 350. Although lacking the reasonable grunt of the 500s, these machines are seriously frugal

2: Basically, the basic Bullet is a basic piece of 1940s engineering, carried on until it could no longer pass modern regs while still being capable of self-propulsion. Behind the engine is a mighty gearbox that is not in the least bit delicate, has four speeds and even a neutral finder. The oil for the engine lives behind the engine's crankcases, where it gets nice and hot nice and quickly. The carb seen here is a replacement…





1



2

3: Over on the drive side, all is smooth and surprisingly oil-tight. If you delight in simplicity, this is for you

4: Power is taken from the crank to the clutch by a duplex chain, with electricity supplied by a crank-mounted alternator. Check out the rubber sealing ring for the primary chaincase, an idea lifted by Norton for its very first Commando

5: The engines are simple and easy to work on. This is a great advantage if you buy a very cheap indeed 'yard find'

These first bikes were branded with Enfield India painted on the tank. This was later changed to just Enfield, the Indian factory having dropped the Royal from their name some years previously for unknown reasons, though having a left-leaning government in the country and a desire to shake off the British colonialist past may have had something to do with it. As a heritage culture bit, a legal fight to use the name Royal Enfield again went on for years, finally being resolved in the UK in 2000, when a court decided that building Royal Enfields was more important than owning the rights to the name but doing nothing with it. In India the company is now fighting multiple battles with companies using the name on pirated clothing brands among other products.

All these late Seventies and early Eighties Bullets came, like Model T Fords, in any colour you liked as long as it was black. These early models certainly looked the part, with gloss black paint on the tanks and hand-applied gold pinstriping that set them apart in showrooms full of garish sticker-clad competitors.

Build quality was, however, thought to be patchy, with chrome, paint and general finish of the variable quality that anyone who has owned a British motor car from the 1970s will recall, probably not that fondly, and the 1977 design itself was little changed from the 1955 model.

The 1977-2008 four-speed carburettor equipped Bullets, both in 350cc and 500cc capacities, are as close as you can get to a British-made classic single (with the obvious proviso!), complete with all the quirks and charms that come with machines of this kind. The 350s were the first to arrive with the 500 following in 1990.

Royal Enfield attempted to make up for not having a big model range by marketing multiple versions with different levels of trim and equipment. From 1977-2008 you could buy a 350 Standard, DL, Superstar and Classic, with 500s in the same branding from 1990-2008. Watsonian-Squire, then the importer, offered a number of special editions of their own, including the trials inspired Woodsman with a high-level exhaust and a single seat and the Clubman, forerunner of the later fuel-injected Continental GT, with an alloy tank and a humped café racer seat.

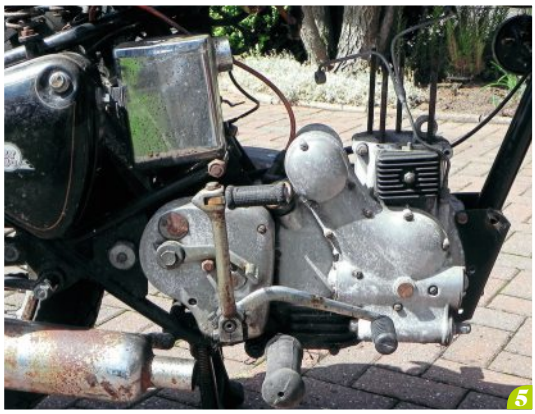
All the early imports would have been fitted with a four-speed gearbox originally designed in 1948. A popular upgrade was fitting older British engines and gearboxes, thought to be more reliable than the Indian offerings, which had varying levels of quality. The first 350s had 6V electrics until 1986. It is a relatively simple job to change this to 12V, and most bikes from the period still on the road will have had this done.



3



4



5

A softer state of tune and lower capacity makes the 350 Bullet a lot easier to kickstart than a 500. The 350 Bullet isn't exactly of a high calibre when it comes to top speed – the 17bhp engine was outperformed by many a 125 when it first arrived. While there is a comfy cruising speed of 50-55mph, anything more than 60mph will ensure the rider experiences genuine 1950s-style vibration.

The extra 150cc improves mid-range performance on the 500, but the 20+bhp power output doesn't add a lot to the top end. However, the average Bullet owner is unlikely to be looking for a high-speed motorcycle, while the tractable power in the midrange on the bigger Bullet makes for a more relaxing ride. By more modern standards it's not a quiet engine, with plenty of rustling and mild clattering going on, but as long as an engine isn't making loud mechanical thumping noises it should be okay. The over-engineered 350 is less likely to have serious mechanical problems than the 500.

The frame is common to all carb-equipped models and is a lift from the old British 1948 example. A simple single downtube frame is suspended at the front end by a basic set of non-adjustable telescopic forks with a distinctive leading spindle mount. A set of equally basic adjustable shocks at the back give a ride best described as firm. Silentbloc swinging arm bushes help everything go up and down smoothly.

Brakes on the early 350 are a very basic pair of SLS single width drums and are considered weak, but Enfield owners do not tend to be sticklers for originality and with large numbers of 500s with twin leading shoe front brakes now on the road, a lot of 350s will have had better brakes fitted, though even these require very careful setting up to work well. The brakes on the early models were of variable quality, with some of the twin leading shoe items coming into the UK with oval drums, easily spotted by the juddering. Although irritating, it's simple to fix by skimming the drum. Like all drum brakes, careful setting up will always improve stopping power.

Some riders prefer to swap the front forks for a set from a later model fitted with a disc and in some cases a Brembo caliper to grip it.

That four-speed box with its British-style right foot change is a notchy, not to say agricultural affair and neutral can be hard to find at a standstill. Enfield came up with its own solution to this by being the only manufacturer to fit the box with a neutral finder. This is an extra lever that is mounted above the right foot change that takes the bike into neutral from any gear, a typically British solution to an engineering problem – instead of fixing a problem, add something that makes it go away. Owners of Italian motorcycles might wish they had the same mechanism. The four-speed box is designed to be lubricated with grease, rather than oil, though users often use EP90 gear oil with no marked difference.

Enfield recognised that a bike equipped solely with a kickstart might be a bit out of date in the early 21st century and you could have an optional electric start fitted on 2001-2003 models to create the 500ES. Unfortunately, this design wasn't perfect and the starter clutch could destroy itself if the bike backfired while starting.



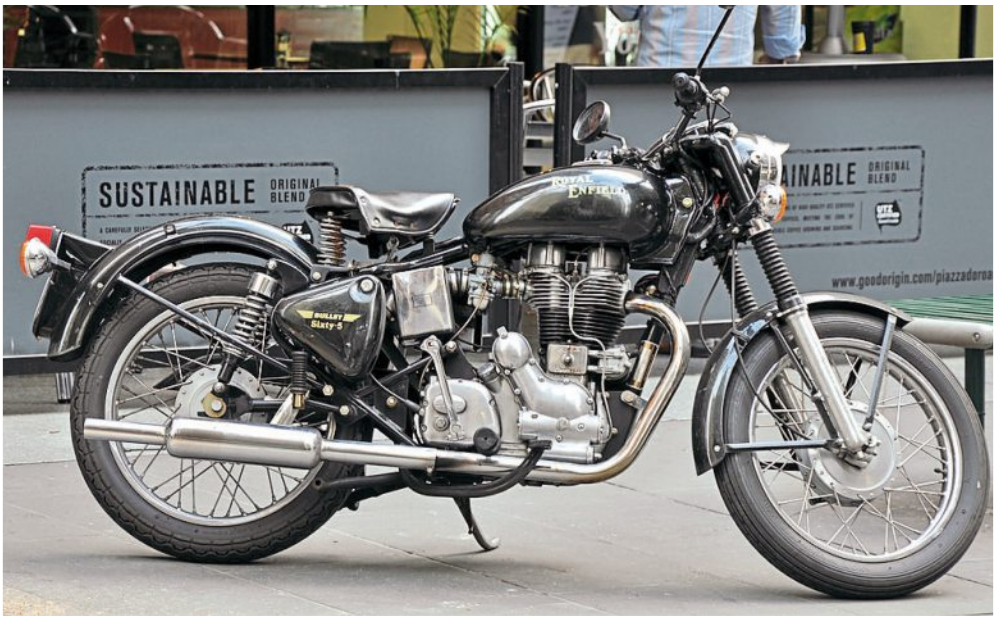
Above: Anyone who has doubts about the underlying strength of the Bullet can attempt an Indian mountain ride. The Bullet in its native land: a seriously tough piece of kit

Below: The accessory age arrived as soon as those nostalgic for their old bikes become also nostalgic for the terrible things they did to them in pursuit of style and alleged performance. Mind you, some armies used the bikes for years, and if you fancy yourself in khaki…









Until 1998 Enfield was wedded to the appropriately named bullet connector to hold everything in the wiring loom together. This makes for a messy, unreliable and unwieldy collection of coloured wires and can cause problems. Later models were fitted with block connectors to make things more reliable. Electronic ignition arrived in 2004 as a standard fitment and alternative aftermarket set-ups like the Boyer Bransden system can be retro-fitted to eliminate the contact breakers on older bikes. The engine vibration can destroy bulbs, especially cheap ones, but the 21st century has come up with a solution for this in the shape of LED illumination and it's worth paying a few pounds extra to change the old bulbs for LEDs when they blow, as they almost inevitably will.

Switchgear quality is a mercurial thing, with the set-up on the first models too often hopelessly unreliable. Better German-made Magura switches replaced the old set-up, but were replaced in turn by an Indian design that wasn't as good. The bikes had a rather lovely and well-made headlamp nacelle – the 'casquette' – with a smart pair of riding lights and an ammeter so you can keep an eye on the performance of the charging system.

Things took a very different turn in 2002 when Enfield launched the Sixty-5. The style of the Sixty-5 took its cues not from the 1950s, but the decade that followed, hence the name. It had a ribbed seat, brighter colours, redesigned bodywork and, most importantly, a brand-new five-speed gearbox. This has an easier to find neutral and a better spread of closer ratio gears, the new fifth gear being the same as the old fourth. Electric start was standard, with a redesigned starter clutch to solve the self-destruction problem experienced with the ES.

The Sixty-5 was joined in 2004 by the Electra-X, which saw Enfield produce a new Austrian-designed engine giving the Indian Bullet its first new power plant in more than 50 years. The Electra-X has higher compression, an alloy cylinder replacing the old cast iron item, a much more efficient oil pump and a roller bearing big end that can, however, give more trouble than the plain bearing crank on the iron-barrelled models. The old slide carb was replaced by a CV item on the Electra-X, and although the Electra-X is not much faster than the older 500, it feels tighter and was built to finer tolerances than the older Bullets. It also has a disc brake on the front.

If you fancy something different and really are not concerned about top speed but are taken with the idea of real economy motorcycling, then there is always the option of a diesel powered Bullet. Enfield produced its own for the Indian market – using irrigation pump engines! – and today Price Part Motorcycles will convert your Bullet to use a more modern 406cc single-cylinder direct-injection diesel engine producing 10hp, a top speed not exceeding 55mph and a parsimonious 180-200 miles to the gallon. Price Part also offers completely reconditioned pre-1972 diesel powered Indian Bullets – the advantage being you don't have to pay road tax as they are classic vehicles.

Above left: 2ls drum brakes, as fitted to Bullets until relatively recently, can be made to work very well, we're told. *CBG*'s crew have ridden lots and lots of Bullets, and none of the drum brakes has been entirely riveting

Above right: As well as the handy fifth gear, the Sixty-5 also boasted a starter motor, boosting the bike's appeal by a huge amount

Below: One giant leap towards modernity was the 2002 arrival of the Bullet Sixty-5, with its seriously modernised five-speed gearbox and a little tidying up



FAULTS AND FOIBLES

On the whole the mechanics of a Bullet are fairly easy to deal with, with the engine basic and mostly simple to work on. Both wheel and steering bearing replacement is simple enough, although replacing a failed starter clutch on the ES can be a tricky job.

A fine mist of oil comes from the engine of these Bullets – particularly the early examples – more often than not, but apart from being a little unsightly and requiring regular checks, provided levels are regularly topped up this isn't a major problem unless you are obsessed with oil tightness.

There are plenty of places oil can leak from, including the primary chaincase, head gaskets (usually solved by torqueing the head down properly) and the gearbox sprocket seal, which can only be replaced by taking the clutch off. An engine breather sends oil mist to the airbox, and



Below: As with all Bullets, the Sixty-5 is almost infinitely moddable. How's about this fine modernist urban scratcher, complete with 612cc, a disc up front and much mass removed – including the starter motor?



Right: Probably the ultimate development of the original Bullet is the Electra X, with its near-modernist top end, much internal revisionism – and a disc front brake

though you might see oil dripping from the bottom of the box, it is a cleaner solution than the old Royal Enfield practice of fitting a long and ugly pipe the length of the bike and along the back mudguard, venting to atmosphere. Some might even feel this oiliness is a handy anti-corrosion method.

The bikes use old-fashioned rubbers on the footrests, kickstart and gearshifts. These are quite soft to absorb the vibes and will wear out, but they are cheap and easy to replace. The early electrical system, with its bullet connectors, needs carefully looking after if it is going to be reliable – any odd lighting effects are usually down to decaying earth connections.

Something to consider, if you are the kind of owner who likes to do your own maintenance and only have experience of Japanese or European models, is that you'll need a whole new toolbox. Until the introduction of the fuel-injected models, Enfields were built with British Cycle threaded nuts and bolts, which you will need BSF/Whitworth spanners, sockets and other tools to handle. This is less of a problem than it was – in the 1980s and 1990s only specialist tool suppliers held these in stock and sold them at a considerable premium over AF and Metric tools. Owners jealously guarded their collections. But as bikes and cars that use Whitworth spanners have become more and more scarce on the road and old mechanics shuffle off this mortal coil, a sizable quantity of very high quality tools are now showing up at autojumbles and the like. Indeed, rummaging through boxes of old tools is often part of the fun. A Britool Whitworth socket set was spotted for sale at a recent autojumble for around the same price as a cheap Chinese-made metric equivalent.

1: As before, the Electra X was offered by wily dealers in several trims. Like this 1950s-revivalist Classic

2: If making an impression of speed is your thing, try a Sportsman

3: On the other hand, back in the classic haze RE singles were very effective: try this Grass machine for a little muddy action

If buying, be careful that what you are looking at is a genuine official import model, and not a private import from India – Indian market models have very different specifications, and some of the parts used are not up to UK standards. Indian market engines can be different internally too. You can usually spot an Indian import by careful checking. The presence of a front number plate, compulsory in India, is a giveaway. There are more than a few Indian sellers offering home market models and these always seem to be listed on auction sites as being pre-1977 bikes, even though they are commonly 500s, a model that wasn't made until 1988.

One thing you won't get from an Enfield that you will usually get from a British motorcycle is a rise in value year-on-year. With so many new and nearly new Bullets on the market, prices go down, not up. This being the case, unless you like that sort of thing, a restoration project is hardly worth bothering with when better, newer bikes are available – unless it is complete and absurdly cheap.







PEER GROUP

As a machine out of time, a newish carb-equipped Bullet has few equals, but the Japanese have frequently dipped their toes into manufacturing a British-style single. The longest-lived example is Yamaha's SR500/400. This arrived in 1978, around the same time as the first Indian Bullets and, in its initial form, it lasted into the mid-1980s in British showrooms. An SOHC 500 dry sump single with no electric start, the Yamaha is a charming machine to ride, though less charming to start, despite the presence of a decompressor. With big wide bars and a sit-up-and-beg riding position, the SR is easy to chuck about, oil tight and generally well made, with few problems from engine or chassis. It has a particular type of charm too. In production continuously as a 400 for the Japanese home market since 1978, Yamaha started importing the SR400 into the UK a few years ago. Though it hardly makes a splash in the Yamaha catalogue – it's almost as if they are embarrassed by it – you can still pick up a new one if you work hard at it.

Honda responded to Yamaha by releasing the XBR and GB500 singles in 1985. These are marginally more sophisticated than the SR, with an electric start and dated Comstar wheels, on the XBR at least. It's by no means as pretty as an SR in XBR form, and doesn't come close to the Bullet, but it does have the legendary Honda reliability factor. The GB500TT is a far more attractive proposition, but was not officially imported into the UK. Fairly substantial quantities have arrived as grey imports and command premium prices. Kawasaki only gently touched on things with its classically styled 250 Estrella, a sister to its W650, and the less said about Suzuki's fragile GN400 the better. The Rotax-engined Matchless G80, made by LF Harris in Devon at the end of Harris Bonneville production, is also worth a look, especially if you can find a rare electric start version – the kickstart-only bike can be tough to get going. And, of course, there is a huge range of EFI-equipped Bullets to choose from as well.



Top: Finally, sold only in the UK from 2010, came the Woodsman. Rearset rests, trail bars, a solo seat and an uplifted exhaust made for an entirely fine machine. Recommended: a *CBG* firm favourite

Below: Although it resembles the original Bullet, in fact this is a rather different engine, bearing solutions to a lot of the early models' oddities. Well-made and well finished, they can go on for years



ON THE ROAD

If you have never ridden a British motorcycle from the 1960s before, the first thing you'll notice when sitting on a Bullet is how solid it feels. With next to no plastic on the bike, apart from the side panels on the later models, even a 350 Bullet will feel like a substantial chunk of aluminium and steel. While they have a reputation for being a sturdy plodder, a well-sorted Bullet with some weight reduction carried out can be surprisingly sprightly. There's not a lot to a Bullet and with its firm suspension and good ground clearance it can be an agile mount. Trials conversions are a fun and chunky ride, but road bikes aren't exactly Gold Stars on the twisty bits. Like any period motorcycle kickstarting a Bullet is a knack, though it is fairly easy to get the hang of it, especially if the carb and ignition are properly set up.

With such a simple design it can be easy to turn your Bullet into something personal and special, which is why so few Bullets look the same. Enfields have to be one of the best provided-for motorcycles when it comes to aftermarket parts. Hitchcocks' Bullet catalogue is nearly 300 pages long and is a must for all Bullet buyers, while owners of other marques can only stare and wonder at the riches within. Hitchcocks supply kits to build trail bikes and café racers, seats, uprated engine parts, replacement carbs, better brakes, electrical gee-gaws, gaskets by the ton and even a complete bolt-on rigid rear end for those hankering after something even more authentically 1940s. CBG

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Electrified Commando

A restoration with a little electric sting in the tale...

WORDS BY ROB DAVIES **PICTURES BY** ALAN CLARK AND ROB DAVIES

THE NORTON COMMANDO is one of the great classic bikes of the second half of the 20th century, and was essentially the final stage of the British archetypal twin cylinder arrangement designed by Bert Hopwood back in 1948. But... is it possible to take a grubby, ill-maintained 1970s Norton Commando and turn it into a better machine than it was when it came from the factory in 1974? Alan Clark shows us how to do it, with lots of work, new stuff and a certain amount of hard cash.

I genuinely went to Alan's to sing the Norton's praises. Unfortunately, the 850 Commando – finished as it was to a very high standard – was parked right next to an equally beautifully restored Honda CB750, and I couldn't help but start to compare the two machines. Both bikes are, of course, from the very same decade, and yet they are miles apart, not only in looks, weight and handling, but also in finish and technology. At a glance we could see why one machine was in its ascendency, while sadly the British machine was on its way down.

Above: The end of the story: a Commando worth waiting for

1: The bike as purchased as a non-runner in 2011 with 24,000 on the clock. The pictures are much too kind – like some overly generous sales brochure. But get close and personal and this was a grubby beast with black gasket goo dribbling from various mating surfaces

2: The trained eye will observe the non-standard parts such as alloy rims, Dunstall silencers, unusual rear shocks and others. The ripped seat is a harbinger of worse to come, and just what is that carburettor?

















Having said all that, there is no doubt that with its clever, well designed frame and race-honed engine, coupled with its small but punchy styling, the Norton was going to win any street race hands down. But sadly the race for the popularity ratings and thus ultimate survival went clearly to the Honda with its superior build quality – and I'm presently focussing in on all kinds of features here; the finish to the barrels and head, the exhaust hanger brackets that appear so clumsy and basic on the Norton. And then there is the complete lack of styling to the square tail-light assembly. And for goodness sake why does any manufacturer put the ignition key down between the rider's legs and not at the console? And ignition coils that hang down from under the fuel tank? Also, Norton still stuck rigidly to the pre-unit construction design that was an engineering anachronism in the 1970s. Still, as they say, these are just trifles to the aficionado…

CBG: There is always the worry of buying a non-runner, Alan.

ALAN: There is, but at least I knew the worst with this bike, with just 24,000 miles on its clock. A saboteur had tipped sand into the oil tank – yes, people actually do this kind of thing – so not only was the bike in a filthy state, but the whole engine required stripping, cleaning, and then kitting out with all new bearings, a regrind and a rebore.

The paint scheme was standard Candy Apple Red, but as you know, red does not stay red for very long and had faded to pink in places. Fortunately, I had able assistance from two sources here in the Midlands; Pete Lovell at Pete Lovell Developments, who is an amazing engineer and has been working with Nortons for many years; and Les Emery at Norvil, my very own Norton Jedi Master, who has an abiding passion for his work.

CBG: Why did the bike have an SU carburettor fitted?

ALAN: The factory-fitted twin Amal 32 Concentric carbs had slides that wore quickly, and soon went decidedly sloppy, so some guys bought a manifold kit and fitted an SU carburettor of the type that was often fitted to the E Type Jag. The carb works well but it's an ugly looking piece of unoriginal kit, so it had to go.

3: Now if only Norton had kept the earlier more stylish fastback unit, or even taken a leaf from the Kawasaki Zeds' rear ends when it styled the tail section and rear light, it could have been a thing of beauty. The bike appears to have lost its grabrail and rear indicators, too

4: The SU carburettor – and that strange choice of location for the ignition key. Suppose it kept the key nice and warm on long cold rides

5: Not so attractive 'custom' shocks – possibly elderly S&Ws hold up the rear end, while knurled aluminium nuts lock the seat at their tops. Check out the complicated rear exhaust mounts – essential with the rubber-mounted power train

6: Surprisingly clean front end of the venerable Norton twin engine. The tacho drive cable's connection to the crankcase often leaks. Observe the big black cylindrical engine mounting: that's the front Isolastic mount

7: The oil tank is in the traditional British position on the right-hand side of the bike. The two nuts at the top retain the trim panel covering the tank itself

8: The original front hub. Not really enough stopping power for today's roads. Alan will soon upgrade this to a much more effective twin disc arrangement

9: A hydraulic clutch had been fitted to take the place of the original cable system, but it was later returned to the cable arrangement. Both worked well, as the Norton does have an excellent diaphragm clutch, which should be both light and smooth in operation









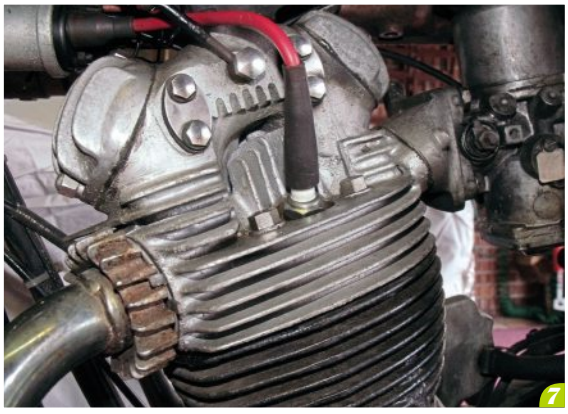
The original points system had been replaced by a Boyer ignition, which is okay if your battery is in good condition, but since then I have fitted a Pazon system that supplies a better spark, even when the battery is not at its best. I decided against returning to the twin carb arrangement purely to attain some kind of authenticity. Carburettors have developed a long way since those Amals, and in the end I went for reliability with the Mikuni VM. The advantages are simple enough: no more need for balancing; easy starting with no 'tickle' and a solid reliable tickover. There is nothing worse than pulling up at a junction or a set of lights to have the engine cut, and then have to go through all the start/kickover routine.

CBG: Your 850 was really the last in the line of the Commandos?

ALAN: The earlier Dominator was a good design, but began to creak at the seams, as it was pushed from 500 to 600 to 650 and finally 750cc. However, the Commando engine did have some design features that set it apart from the earlier Dommy, including a tilted forward engine that made it look as though it was going faster even at a standstill.

By 1974, when this 850 Mk2A was built, most of the Commando's faults had been dealt with, though a little too late to save the breed. A few of those faults, such as breaking barrels near the crankcase on race engines, were major, too. To prevent the barrels and head from moving apart – not a rare or pleasant phenomenon – in addition to the studs holding the barrels down, four long caphead high tensile bolts passed through the head to sandwich the cylinders securely to the crankcase halves. Importantly, Norton had altered the specification of the main bearings from a simple roller to a bearing in which the rollers had radiused ends – the famous 'superblend' bearings.

They also did away with the rear mounted breather, replacing it by boring five holes through the crankcase wall into the timing chest, allowing the blow-by gasses to vent into the timing chest and then into atmosphere via a pipe fitted to the rear of the timing chest, and a second pipe to take oil to the oil tank for recirculation. ▸




1: A pile of parts, stripped out and ready for a little refinishing

2: One engine, dismantled down to and including the crankshaft, ready for checking and rebuilding

3: Replacing the original twin Amals with a single SU carb was remarkably popular for a while. Here's one, complete with a neat manifold conversion

4: The rear wheel drive, brake lever and hub arrangement. The Isolastic system demanded a change from rod to cable operation for the rear drum. The result? A very gentle device. Commandos were never over-braked

5: The left-hand side panel covers the bike's battery and sundry other electrical bits. That seat really has ridden its last ride…

6: The original Norton primary chaincase, complete with inspection caps for adjustment of the clutch and for checking the primary drive chain tension. And that brake light switch arrangement might look a little primitive – but it works fine

7: Non-standard finned rocker covers were one of many cosmetic accessories you could get in those exciting days. The stainless fasteners are also handsome and a good idea

8: You might well think that this mess of a loom was the result of a previous meddler, but it was apparently the original arrangement. We're reliably informed that there were several wires that went nowhere, but were fitted to the loom for the convenience of the occasional Police motorcycle. Alan fitted a new Norvil centre loom for £40



Commandos handle very well indeed, one result of a clever frame design with this single big diameter top tube providing a lot of rigidity. Many were the tears shed when this frame replaced the legendary featherbed, however







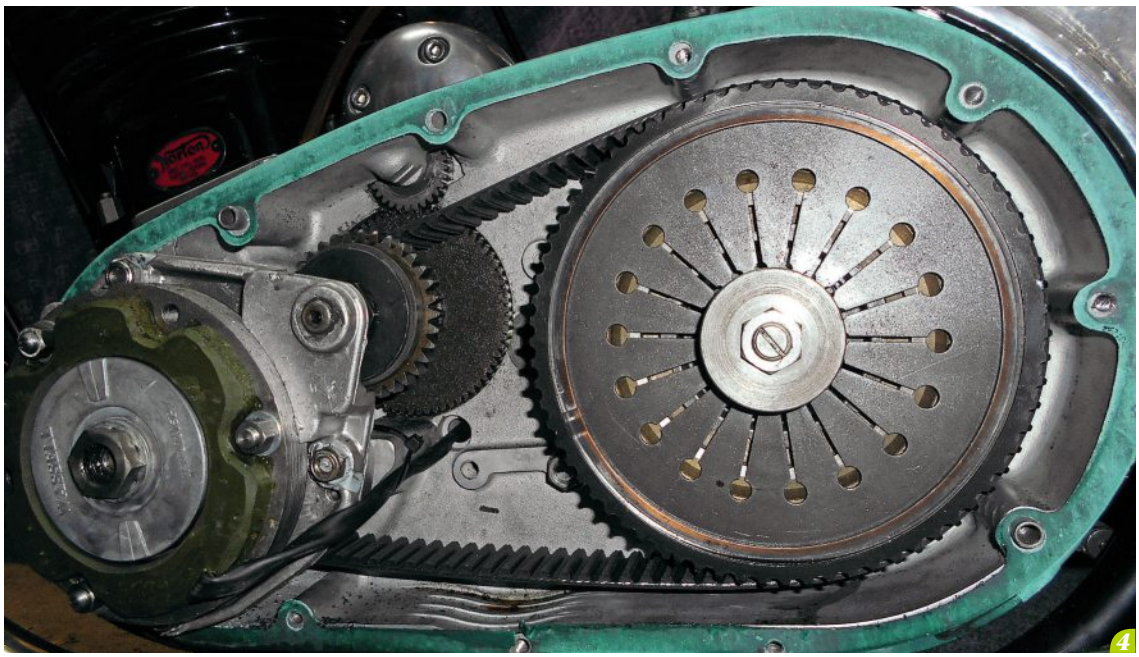
'Isolastic' was the term given to the rubberised anti-vibration system that effectively isolated the engine, gearbox and swinging arm from the rest of the frame – and it was remarkably effective, unlike a lot of other rubber-mounting arrangements. This could cause problems at the rear end when play wore into the swinging arm bearings, and a simple but fiddly shim system was utilised to adjust the Isolastics until the 850 Mk3 appeared with a better – Vernier – method of taking up the slack. There's little hard about this: a new set of Isolastic bolts was about £35, so there was no point in putting the old ones back on.

1: One refinished Commando frame. Observe the essence of the Isolastic arrangement. The swinging arm mounts to the gearbox cradle, which itself mounts to the main frame through the rear iso device. The gearbox cradle bolts to the back of the engine, which is iso-mounted to the front downtubes and to the main top tube via its headsteady

From there on it was strip down, degrease and clean every item meticulously with paraffin; get the frame and black work off to Redditch Shot Blasting for powder coating (£350) while getting on with the engine rebuild.

CBG: You say you dabbled with an electric leg?

ALAN: Yes. I had problems with my knees, so kicking the bike to start it got more and more painful. In desperation I bought one of the Alton starter units – and it wasn't cheap at £1500. The kit is quite extensive and comes with a completely new



2: After some unhappiness with an add-on electric foot, owner Alan decided to upgrade the entire engine to a Mk3 Commando's arrangement. So… this is the replacement timing side crankcase, with a new Pazon ignition set in it

3: The bike's replacement SU carb was, in turn, replaced by this neat Mikuni, complete with fuel lines and breathers various

4: Fitting a Commando Mk3's starter kit requires replacement of the entire primary drive. Here's the gear train from the starter motor (at the top of the chaincase) to the crankshaft. The original primary drive would have been by chain, but drive belts are the modern way. Observe the excellent diaphragm spring clutch, too

primary drive; primary chaincase inner and outer; connecting cables from a slimmer alternator and, of course, the starter motor that sits behind the barrels. The conversion took me most of a day, came with clear instructions, but as usual these days there is an excellent tutorial on YouTube.

CBG: But it worked?

ALAN: It was fine for about six months, and then it packed in altogether – very frustrating, I can tell you. Having said that, the company did repair it for another £100 (rain had got into the starter motor), but I wanted reliability as my knees weren't getting any better. Sometime later I was at Norvil, the Midlands Norton specialist in Burntwood, and Les Emery suggested that I convert to the later Norton electric start that was fitted to the Mk3. This was a pretty big job where you need to have completely new crankcases and crank, plus the starter motor, so it's basically an engine rebuild, and not cheap either.

5: This is no longer a Mk2A Commando. It's somewhere halfway between the Mk2A and the Mk3, as you can see from the electric start Mk3 primary cases and the left foot brake. Mk3s are all right foot brake machines

6: If a job's worth doing… The forks have been treated to new sliders to carry the AP Lockheed racing calipers, which grip a pair of floating Norvil rotors. It is a considerable improvement over the original wooden single disc brake







1



2

Fortunately I have a good relationship with the guys at Norvil, and they did sweeten the deal, whereby my old crankcases went to them as part of the swap – what a chap does for the old knees eh? It has worked well ever since. As for the Alton, I fitted that to a second Norton that I had built, and that is also still working well, and at least the owner gave me £600 for it, so it wasn't a complete disaster.

CBG: Now this is probably a silly question, but which one do you prefer, and what's the difference in the ride? The Norton and your Honda, I mean.

ALAN: They are such different creatures that you can't really compare them, and I thoroughly enjoy them both. The Commando is much lighter and far more agile, especially in the way it corners like a true racing machine, but the Honda is so sophisticated. And ultimately it simply depends on which one I fancy taking out. CBG

Above: Result!

1: Uncluttered clocks. The green blobs are one of the few styling cues from the original 1967 Commando to survive at this point in the bike's development

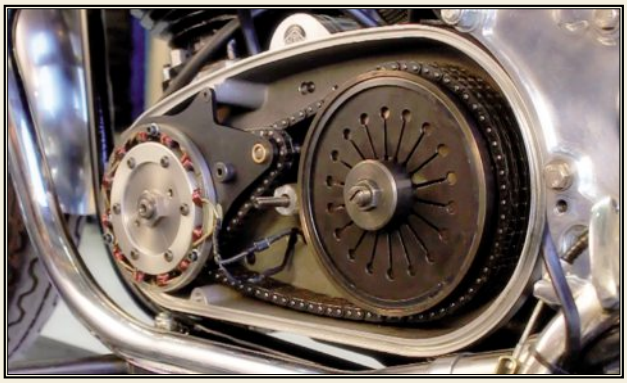
2: Few Commando riders are confident enough to leave off the kickstart lever, and in any case it's a useful device, allowing the rider to kick over a cold engine a few times before pressing the button. Thus saving the battery an even harder life. Triumph T160 Trident kickstart lever, too

3: That traditional proud owner shot. Which of these two Seventies superbikes would you choose?

3

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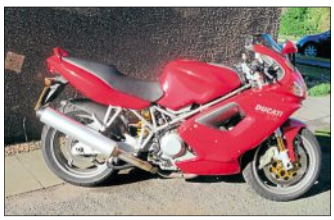
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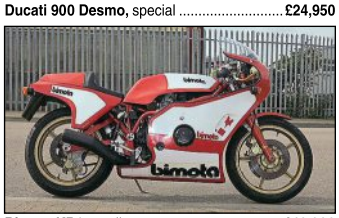
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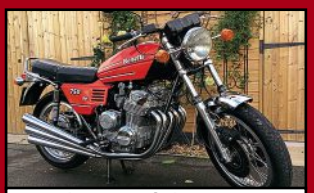
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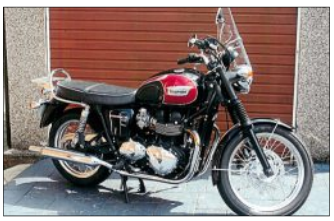
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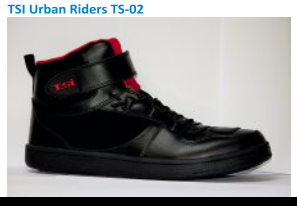
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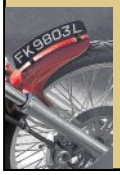
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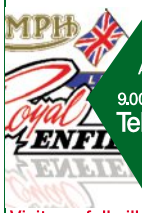


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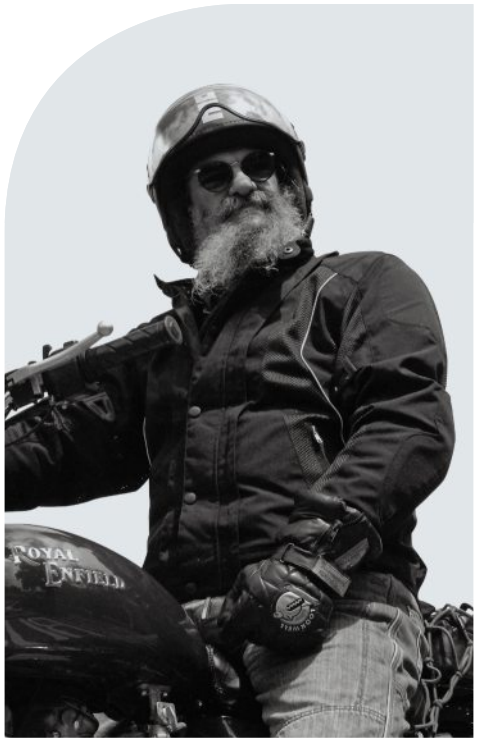
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FRANK **WESTWORTH**

Braking up is hard to do

An obsession with Go is understandable; we also need to Stop

EVERYONE SPENDS A fortune on their engine. OK… mostly everyone. Even me. Sometimes. Not always. Neglect and complacency are rife around here. What I'm trying to say is that the entire history of powered two-wheeled flight is obsessed with building bigger, better, faster engines so that speed-crazed lunatics can indulge their insane fantasies, their dreams of achieving some kind of motorcycle nirvana, some kind of outstanding terminal velocity.

Without decent brakes, even a fairly mild velocity can be terminal. Really. Trust me. I write from grim experience. I survived a head-on collision with a coach only because the driver of the big bus decided to ram me outside a hospital. Strange but true. Forgiveness is a virtue mainly experienced by others, I find. And when my mentis was sufficiently compos to enquire of a visiting police sergeant what appallingly vast velocity we had collectively achieved, coach and I, he shook his head in a gentle, sympathetic kind of way and remarked that 'They had to tow the coach, you know. It may have been written off.'

I think this was intended to cheer me up somehow. It failed. How fast was that lunatic going? It felt important at the time. I'd been out on a 650 AJS, not entirely a Hayabusa … in fact not even close to it, so I expected that I'd been trolling gently along, as is my wont. The damage was incredible. The Ajay's front wheel had been rammed backward between the frame's downtube with such vigour that the engine had been shoved backward, breaking off its front mounting lugs. That is not easy. The sergeant relented. '32-34', he said, eventually. You can imagine my surprise.

But yes, the combined speed of bus et moi had been around 30mph. I instantly developed a passionate interest in the braking abilities of all my motorcycles. Maybe, I suggested, if I'd had a 2ls plate fitted to the Norton stopper on the AJS I might have stopped and been saved from all that messy indignity? The sergeant smiled indulgently. Apparently they measure the tyre marks, you know. Apparently this is very accurate stuff. Technical. Apparently I had just about stopped. Before I really stopped, if you see what I mean.

But the anchorage obsession continues to this day. ABS? Yes please. Twin floating discs with six-pot Fandango calipers? Yes please. I have never knowingly tuned a bike for a greater top speed, but I tune all of my own machines for enhanced retardation – in case I encounter another idiot piloting a coach.

This does not of course suggest in any way, no, no, not at all, that I am actually any good at making brakes work. I know that you'll be shocked by that, but it is true. When it comes to old bikes – which in this case means old bikes with old drum brakes – I always replace shoes and springs along with tyres. Why not? They're cheap. A whole lot cheaper than spending months in recuperation. So why is it that so many modern brake parts – replacement parts for old bikes – are so very average?

Relatively recently, I replaced a set of shoes in the front wheel of an AJS twin with a shiny new set. Of course the linings were bonded to the shoes and not riveted, for that is the more modern way, and the linings are also made of some miracle friction-free material, possibly a Teflon derivative. I discovered this the old empirical way by applying the brake. It did almost nothing. Experimentation is a wonderful thing, everyone should be taught science at school. After empirical research comes analysis and conclusions, sometimes followed by an appropriate response.

Analysis? Friction-free (and presumably asbestos-free) brake linings are not a great step forward. Conclusion? Feeble brakes are bad things and feeble new linings do not help. Response? Refit ancient original brakes, thereby at a stroke restoring the anchor to its previously feeble but less feeble than with new linings condition.

I like good brakes. I also like the planet we all inhabit. I understand that asbestos dust is a bad thing and that original 1959 brake linings used a lot of it. I also understand that modern drum brakes work very well indeed with modern healthy lining materials. So… how come modern friction materials failed to stop that AJS? Answers on a used tenner to the editorial address, as always. CBG

'I have never knowingly tuned a bike for a greater top speed, but I tune all of my own machines for enhanced retardation – in case I encounter another idiot piloting a coach…'

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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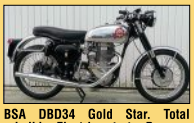
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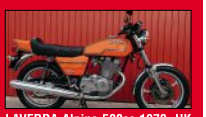
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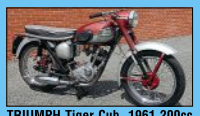

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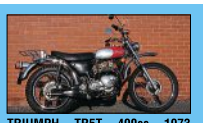

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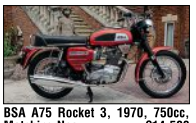

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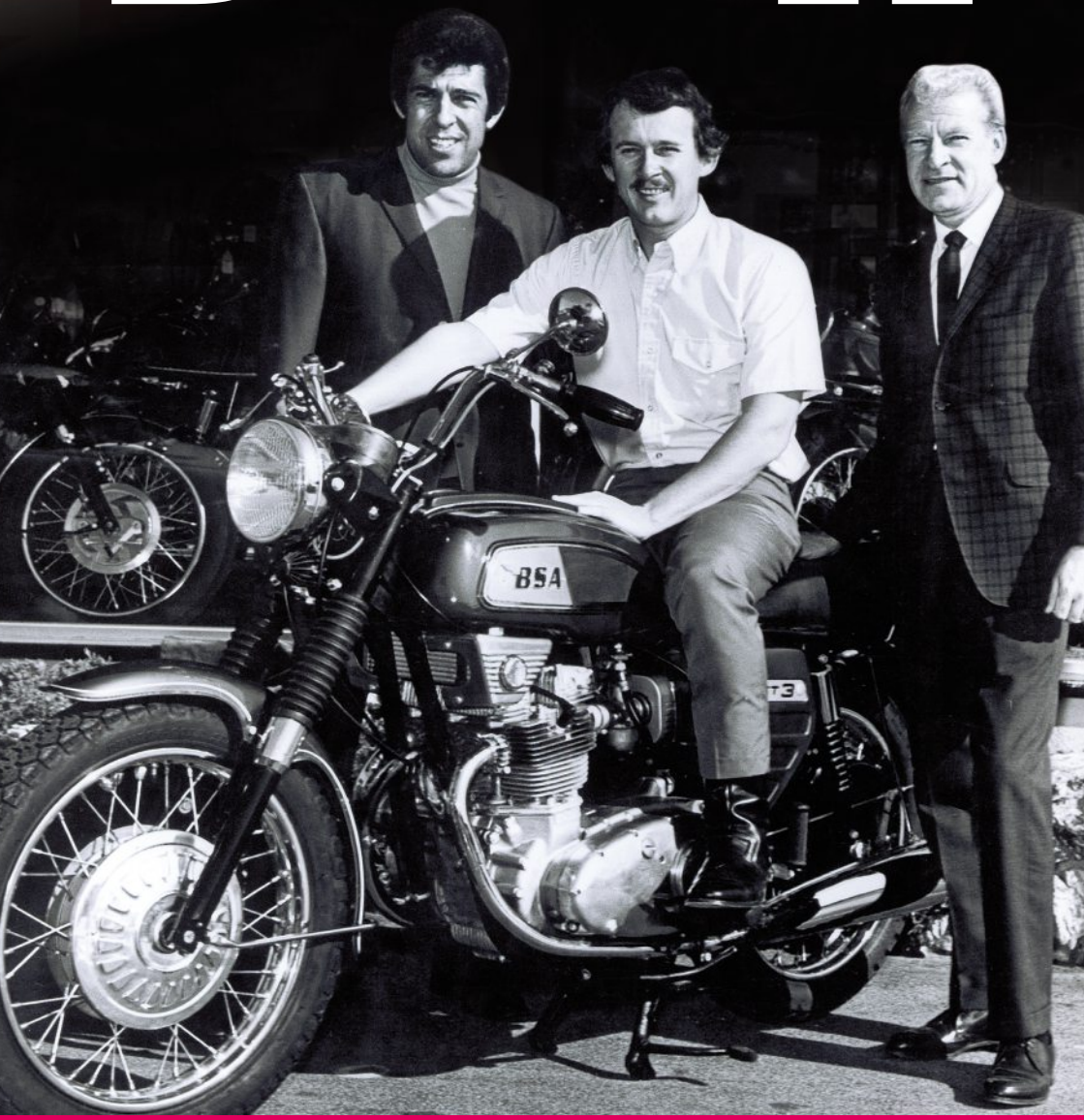
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Sticking with the Bonnie idea, if you want the whole 1950s Rocker thing – complete with pre-unit charm, genuine Edward Turner styling and a glorious tangerine paint job – then you are not going to be happy with a 1972 T120 rather than a T120 from 1959 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…

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HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

THIS GUIDE IS as exhaustive as we could fit into the pages of this supplement. We update the information throughout the year as we trawl the marketplace... so it's as up-to-date as possible.

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…

AJS & MATCHLESS

By 1950, Associated MotorCycles Limited in South London was building bikes under both AJS and Matchless badges, and at one time boasted the largest factory in the world dedicated to motorcycle 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 two-strokes all the way through to stonking 750cc four-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 two-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 it needed a lightweight four-stroke motorcycle to rival Triumph's Cub and BSA's C-range. Intelligently, they used a bicycle based on their James two-strokes and designed their own new four-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. Prices are currently rising, as the demand for physically smaller old bikes increases. The best bets 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 two-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, and currently enjoying rising prices along with their 250 stablemates.

Prices:
low £1750 || high £2750

Model 16 (Matchless G3)

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

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 in spec to the wartime Matchless WD G3L, then switched to swinging arm suspension as the end of the 1940s approached, avoiding the 'plunger' rear suspension used by others. 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 and are rising in value at the moment. 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 £2200 || 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 traditional AMC single really is a bigger version of the 350, with a bit more of everything, especially torque. 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… When considering a machine which claims a competition heritage with engine number suffixes C, CS or TCS, check with owners' club before buying.

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 its 500cc Dominator 88 and stretched it into the 600cc Dominator 99, so AMC stretched its 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 || 1962-63

CONSCIOUS OF THE ever-growing demand – particularly in America – for more power, AMC stretched its 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, more rewarding to ride than the sum of its parts. 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 Mk.2 UK-style roadster, a CS street scrambler and a CSR café racer. Confusingly, the CS and CSR can be 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 £9000

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 prewar 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 two-stroke twins, and when these were discontinued in 1965, Ariel were no more. We will ignore the Ariel 3... Spares okay (one good specialist dealer, and the entirely excellent owners' club), apart from tinware.

In common with most other major manufacturers, Ariel entered the postwar 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 the Second World War 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 1950s. One of the few wholly original designs to emerge from the postwar 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 and then found to be popular with learner riders, 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 can be challenging to ride and interesting to own; the excellent swinging arm frame handles rather better. The single engines are all developments of a prewar 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. Few faults, although the Lucas Magdyno can be expensive to refurbish.

Prices:
low £2200 || 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 four-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, so check that what you're buying is the genuine article. 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. Do not expect great acceleration or excitement

Prices:
low £2750 || 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 £2750 || 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 sometimes slightly more expensive alternative to an A10, entirely capable of long-distance two-up travel. However, like other Ariels, the tin bits are scarce, although the rise of replica parts has eased this somewhat. The brakes can be marginal, although they were deemed sufficient for sidecar use in their day.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500

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

THE FAMOUS BRITISH postwar 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 its swinging arm Four into production and the Anstey link plunger rear end can struggle with the weight and performance.



THIS is why the Bantam was so popular. Or not... But there's still an awful lot of them around, they're decently affordable and fun to ride. Less so on motorways of course

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 was the largest motorcycle manufacturer in the world, and there are still fleets of the products of its 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. The 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 in the eyes of some) 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

POSTWAR 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 as they are a lot less common.

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 are 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 £1500 || high £2250

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 1968. 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 and change the engine's oil frequently. Most spares are around, though quality can be extremely variable. The last are probably the best of all the BSA 250 singles and are entirely practical classics.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3000

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 coil ignition and alternator electrics, should be worthwhile contenders for anyone who wants to ride regularly. Good spares availability, too.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £2900

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 £7500 || high £10,000

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

STRETCHED C15, WITH more torque and a cast-in pushrod tunnel to distinguish it from its 250 sibling. 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. Most old soldiers appear to have been converted into trials irons, somehow. The sports SS90 version is very rare now.

Prices:
low £1850 || high £2500

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 their heroic Jeff Smith scrambles heritage. Also sold as the Shooting Star, not to be confused with the twin of the same name. Can be hard to start, so they say...

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 1950s workhorse, this one will run and run. Plunger suspension from 1949, then the admirable BSA swinging arm frame arrived in 1955. Alternator/coil ignition



It always pays to research any bike you don't know before buying. Who knows, you might have stumbled across something as unusual as this 1955 military-spec AJS

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 £2500 || 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. This is a truly legendary motorcycle, and for once the legend is a real one.

Prices:
low £14000 || high £24000

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. Drink plenty ot beef tea before starting.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £5000

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 riders and simply 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 sometimes 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 £2500 || 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 sometimes be found and they make good working bikes. 12V alternator electrics and seriously simple maintenance make them entirely practical riding machines, while many enexpectedly fine comp models have been reimported from export markets, adding to both variety and appeal. Export styling is rather more adventurous than UK home market, too. The engines shouldn't leak and they shouldn't rattle, but they often do…

Prices:
low £2200 || 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 and uprated oil pump conversion are pluses when looking to buy.

Prices:
low £2400 || high £4500.
RGS low £9500 || 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 can often make good buys for riders. Get one while you can! In fact, the single-carb twins are no more rough than any other 650 twins. Spares are plentiful, if of unusually variable quality. Late (post 1971) 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 they can accept the disc brakes and electric starter from the T160 Trident. The late US market bikes are glorious to behold! Fascinating machines. They share an excellent owners' club with Triumph's Tridents.

Prices:
low £7500 || 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° 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 Mk.3 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 two-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 £2250 || high £3500

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* regular crew likes them. Production of a sort dribbled on for years, including a recent 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 updated with the EN10 kit of improved engine parts. Spares supply mostly excellent. The current Hesketh concern is more about developing versions of their new and current 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 £15000

JAMES

The other AMC two-stroke builder, probably most well-known for the 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

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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 two-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 £2100 || high £4000

NORTON

An AMC company from 1953, Norton moved from its Birmingham base to the London AMC works in 1963 as part of the parent company's struggle to stay afloat. It 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 1966, 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, which supplies 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 less than robust Wipac electrical bits. Deluxe version looks smart if you like your bikes in 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 8in 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 £2250 || 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 are rising, reflecting the Electra's appeal to older riders looking for light weight, good brakes ands almost reliable electric starting, uncommon in British bikes.

Prices:
low £2750 || high £4500

Model 50
348cc ohv single || 400lb || 75mpg || 75mph || 1956-63

GENTLE TRAD BRIT single with nice manners and gentle performance. Post 1959 models are the most expensive, with the famous featherbed frame, decent alternator electrics 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 £3500 || high £5000

Model 40
349c ohc single || 340lb || 65mpg || 85mph || 1946-58

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 Second World War soldier DRs.

Used to be found with family chair attached and completely worn out, now usually observed at military revivalist meetings.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £4500
(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 trad British singles of them all. The M18 (1945-54) is essentially the plunger ES2 less the plungers; i.e. it retained the earlier rigid frame but used the Roadholder front end.

Prices:
low £3200 || high £5000

ES2 Mk.2 & Model 50 Mk.2

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 Norton 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 if it's worth any more than the equivalent BSA A7, but always priced higher.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6000

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 intended for the chair pullers and with little to commend it except rarity and the Norton name on the tank. No more on-road performance than the 500. 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 £3500 || high £4750

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

PREWAR RELIC INTENDED to haul vast loads great distances very slowly. Overpriced by the name on the tank, but serene to ride. Some engine spares are difficult to find.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5500

Model 77
RARE TWIN; BASICALLY a 99 engine in a non-featherbed swinging arm bicycle very similar to that used on the same-year ES2 single. 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 £5500
(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. very popular, too, so prices will continue to rise.

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 of all featherbed twins.

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 £7000

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. Visual stunners, and with on/off road performance to match.

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. Take care when buying, as the frame can be delicate around the footrest mounts, and remember that the bike's Teledraulic fork does not accept the Norton 8in anchor.

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 increasingly stressed engine's 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 Mk.3, 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 and modern batteries completely cure starter woes. 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 £9500



Bikes rarely come more glamorous than this BSA Firebird Scrambler. Remember that it's relatively easy to dress up a cheaper Lightning in Firebird bling, so check that it is what it says it is

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. Some spares are hard to find, like tachometers.

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, and budget for a specialist rebuild before use.

Prices:
low £4500 || high £6000

Commander
588cc l/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 a machine 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 on the open road. Superb handling and considerable rapidity. Buy a bike only with a known history and preferably a service record.

Prices:
low £15000 || high £20000

PANTHER
BUILT BY PHELON and Moore in Cleckheaton, West 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 four-stroke singles and a range of two-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 okay.

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 Boudica 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, they famously inspire remarkable devotion in their owners. Rigid machines fetch the highest prices, due to unique style, etc.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6500

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 rare, but the owners' club can usually help.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £5500

ROYAL ENFIELD

From its Redditch works, RE built a remarkably wide and always respectable range of sensible staid singles and twins which were at one time mostly famous for their inability to retain their oil.

The company 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 five-speed gearbox (the Super 5) which had something of a reputation for unreliability.

Prices:
low £2000 || high £3000

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

RESTYLED VERSION OF the five-speed Crusader, with more waft, vibration and oil leaks. Many owners ditched the difficult five-speed gear cluster and replaced it with a four-speed set. Oddly heroic semi-racer styling on the GT model proved remarkably popular, and the name lives on in the current new Inidan offerings.

Prices:
low £2200 || high £3500

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 but can benefit from upgrades using later components from Indian machines, notably in the braking department. Tremendously practical machines for the classic rider.

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. Unjustly ignored by far too many riders for far too long, this combination of a 500 engine in a 250 bicycle deserves more than just a second glance.

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.



For practical pleasure, you can do a whole lot worse than a sporting Matchless twin like this G12 650. They boast decent performance, excellent handling, considerable comfort and fairly feeble brakes

If you fancy a classic riding experience without most of the angst, and if your pockets do not run to a Gold Star, try one.

Prices:
low £1500 || high £3000

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

ANOTHER UNDER-RATED TWIN from Redditch, 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 £3250 || high £4500

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. These beefy machines offer a price / performance balance which is currently rare among British bikes, so try one.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5500

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 third and top. The Rickman-framed offspring is sheer magic, but it was all too late to stop RE from going under.

Prices:
low £5500 || high £9500

SCOTT

Made postwar in Birmingham by the Aerco Jig and Tool Company, which 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.

Remember Scott engines are two-stroke twins and are not like any other engine you'll have encountered. 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-stroke twin || 400lb || 50mpg || 80mph || 1947-mid 60s

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

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

SUNBEAM
THE SUNBEAM NAME was acquired by BSA (from AMC) during the Second World War and was relaunched in 1946 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. The unique ohc inline twin engine is an under-rated gem from its day.

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 £4500 || high £6500

TRIUMPH

These chaps started the British obsession with parallel twins just before

the Second World 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 postwar 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 1950s 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.

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 bearings. The late ones are probably the best, with the BSA Bantam rolling chassis. Massively popular today, and priced way beyond their rarely exciting performance.

Prices:
low £2500 || 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 £2250 || high £3200

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. When fitted with more modern electrics to aid their reliability, these are another example of a current shift away from big heavy twins to lighter more handleable machines.

Prices:
low £2750 || high £4000

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

EARLY POSTWAR 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, and just a few miles will reveal the reason for the enduring popularity of Triumph's twins. Despite their weaknesses, they are fine riding machines. Spares avaiability is excellent, and the quality of those spares has improved radically in recent years. Very active club, too, and the rigid twins are riding high.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £6000

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. Like all pre-unit Triumph twins, prices are rising steadily again, for many reasons... including fashion.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £8500, 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, almost adequate brakes. 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 1961. 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 and some really handsome machines have been repatriated down the years too. 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, with much charm and relatively light weight.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £5500

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 and under-braked but handsome, popular and frisky. One of the most peculiar exhausts ever and unique instruments!

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

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 £4250 || high £6500

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 (1954-61), 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. The current fashion for bobbers and the like has raised the awareness of tele-rigid machines, too, so do not hesitate too long before buying.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

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. US and UK versions of these machines can differ widely, and many export machines are on the home market now. The Thunderbird name was also used for the late (1981-83) short-stroke TR65; an excellently revvy rider's machine but fairly unusual.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6500

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, with a unique for the year duplex frame.

Prices:
low £4500, high £7500

T120 Bonneville
649cc ohv twin || 400lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1959-62

SUPER-SPORTS PRE-UNIT 650; always a favourite among 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 to the price, but if you must have one…

Prices:
low £7500 || high £15000

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. Look for the excellent brakes, small tanks and decent 12V electrics. 1971-74 oily-framed five-speeders (T120V) are the safest, with a disc as well as the fifth gear, and they are easily the cheapest.

Prices:
low £5000 || high £12000

T150 / T160 Trident
740cc ohv triple || 503lb || 37mpg || 120mph || 1968-75

FAST AND EXCITING, with excellent steering and early 750 superbike performance. 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 the Tridents 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. And as well as being rapid, they're also thirsty for both fuel and oil.

Prices:
low £4500 || high £10000



Tried a Triumph? You should. If you fancy a rather different take on the twin-cylinder theme and are feeling bold, try a TSS eight-valver. Running properly, they offer a very fine riding experience indeed – as well as endless fettling opportunities…

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 1988 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. Clean 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 £3500 || high £7000

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 £3500 || high £4500
TR7T a lot more

TR65 Thunderbird
649cc ohv twin || 185kg || 75mpg || 100mph || 1981-82

TRULY EXCELLENT SHORT-STROKE short-lived 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 both tacho and a conventional exhaust. Highly recommended. Smooth easy starters, and just about unburstable. If you stumble over an example of the seriously rare trial version, the TR65T, do not hesitate. A rare gem indeed.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £4500 ||
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 detail changes to produce a striking and unusual machine. Few sold, so rare and overpriced, but charming to ride as well as stand-out distinctive while retaining the T140 virtues of excellent spares availability and easy-to-live-withness.

Prices:
low £6500 || high £9500

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

A BONNIE WITH an eight-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. Get past the almost inevitable initial problems and discover the charming, rapid machine Triumph always intended the TSS to be.

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

VELOCETTE

One of the most individual of English bike builders, Velocette's great postwar 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 £2000 || high £3500

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

AN ATTEMPT AT updating the LE with neat glass fibre bodywork. Very attractive and practical bike, but with less

performance than the Ariel Leader. Rare now but charming to ride.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5000

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 and an affordable way to sample Velo single magic.

Prices:
low £6000 || high £8500

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 £7000 || high £10000

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 £7000 || high £9000

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 £9000 || high £15500

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, this small builder of high-quality, expensive motorcycles soldiered on with high performance twins until 1955, when even re-badging NSU tiddlers couldn't save it. 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...

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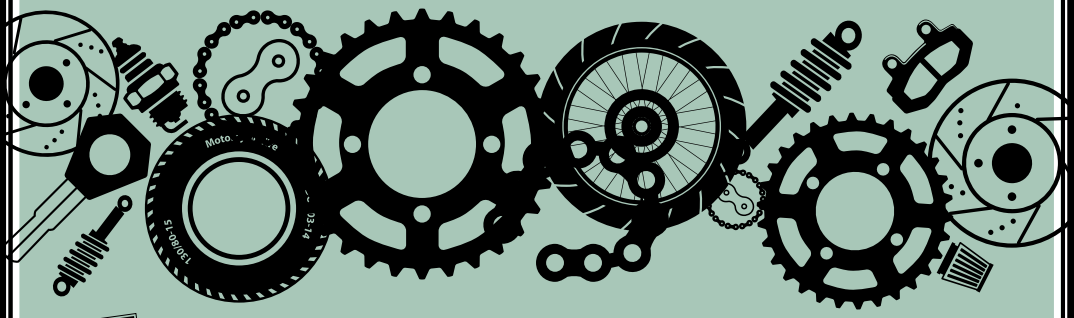
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