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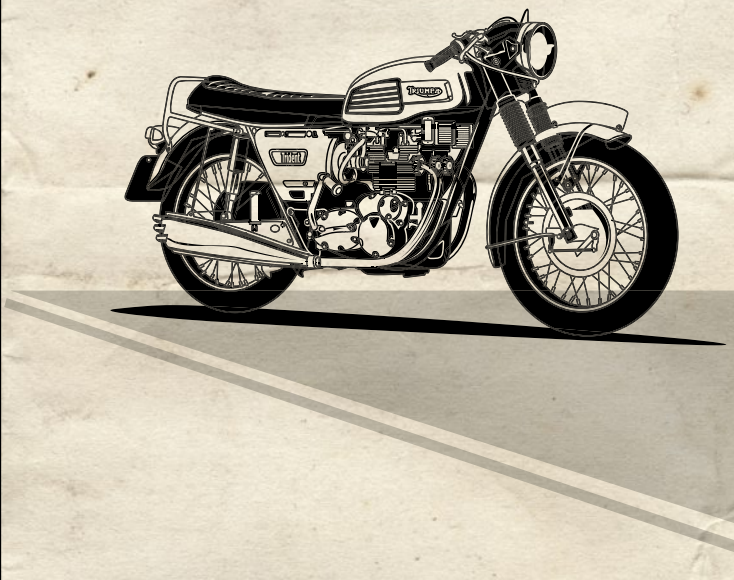

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FRANK WESTWORTH

ONE MAN'S CEILING

ONE OF THE more entertaining parts of this strange job is the annual ritual of working out fresh prices for the guides. I say it's entertaining – which it is, in a peculiar anorak nonsensical kind of way – but it's also an endless puzzle. As well as the 'Who'd ever pay that much for one of those?' there is the increasingly common 'Who'd pay so much for a pile of problems?' And that was a question which rattled around my largely empty cranium as I scribbled down prices and worked out averages.

Because – remember that this is a generalisation and that there are always exceptions – the ceiling prices for the more common (aka 'popular') machines aren't rising much. Sitting down with my own notes from a year ago confirms this. Where the change is happening, pretty much across the wide and ever-expanding spectrum of 'classics', is that the floor prices are rising. This started in the ancient Brit world, where 'unrestored' and 'barn-find' machines have been sailing up in value for some time. And in case you wondered, I put those two adjectives in quotes because the bikes they describe are very often neither of those things.

There are several reasons for this. In the ancient Brit world it appears that an increasing proportion of buyers don't actually want a bike to ride – they want to rebuild or even restore it. And… the same philosophy now appears to have shifted to the world of the elderly Japanese machinery too, despite – or maybe because of – the considerable availability of US market motorcycles making that transatlantic trip. A year or so back this was only rarely the case, now it seems to be much more common, helped no doubt by the current fashion for building modern customs, brats, baggers, bobs and their kind.

And although I rely heavily on auction sites, where it's possible to see the prices bikes actually sell for, rather than their asking prices, I'm also an inveterate jumble-goer, and have watched the prices of unrestored – but complete – machines rising steadily, a trend not matched by the prices of rebuilt/restored machines.

And why now? As well as famously needing to beware, the buyer does actually control the market. Which is all good news.

That's it. See you out there.

Frank Westworth
editor@classicbikeguide.com

EDITOR || Frank Westworth
editor@classicbikeguide.com
PUBLISHER || Tim Hartley
thartley@mortons.co.uk
SENIOR CONTRIBUTOR || Oliver Hulme
SENIOR DESIGNER || Kelvin Clements
DESIGNER || Michael Baumber
PICTURE DESK || Paul Fincham, Jonathan Schofield
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT || Jayne Clements
PRODUCTION EDITORS || Sarah Palmer, Sarah Wilkinson
DIVISIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER || Sue Keily
ADVERTISING ||
Leon Currie 01507 529413 lcurrie@mortons.co.uk
ARCHIVE ENQUIRIES || Jane Skayman
01507 529423 jskayman@mortons.co.uk
SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER || Paul Deacon
CIRCULATION MANAGER || Steven O'Hara
MARKETING MANAGER || Charlotte Park
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR || Dan Savage
COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR || Nigel Hole

CONTRIBUTORS IN THIS ISSUE
Ian Cater, Alan Cathcart, Steve Cooper, Rob Davies, Christopher Dickinson, Rowena Hoseason, Frank Melling, Paul Miles, Paul d'Orléans, Marion Thirsk, Mark Williams

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Mortons Media Group, Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6JR

WEBSITE
www.classicbikeguide.com

GENERAL QUERIES AND BACK ISSUES
01507 529529 24hr answerphone
Email: help@classicmagazines.co.uk
Web: www.classicmagazines.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION
Full subscription rates (but see page 10 for offer): (12 months 12 issues, inc post and packing) – UK £50.40. Export rates are also available – see page 10 for more details. UK subscriptions are zero-rated for the purposes of Value Added Tax.

DISTRIBUTION
Marketforce UK Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU. 0203 787 9001

USA SUBSCRIPTIONS
CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE (USPS:002-674) is published monthly by Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ UK. USA subscriptions are $54 per year from Motorsport Publications LLC, 7164 Cty Rd N #441, Bancroft WI 54921. Periodical Postage is paid at Bancroft, WI and additional entries. Postmaster: Send address changes to CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE, c/o Motorsport Publications LLC, 7164 Cty Rd N #441, Bancroft WI 54921. 715-572-4595 chris@classicbikebooks.com

PRINTED BY || William Gibbons & Sons, Wolverhampton.
ISSN No 0959-7123

ADVERT DEADLINE || June 9, 2017
NEXT ISSUE || June 28, 2017

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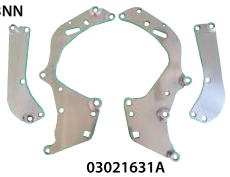
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Saddle up!

MOTO GUZZI SPARES specialists Gutsi Bits have managed to source a limited supply of replacement seats for 1970s V-twins. The replica T3 seats replace the originals which have been unavailable for many years. Gutsi Bits say the seats are of good quality, include the standard latch mechanism and are made in Italy.

Gutsi Bits also offer replica Le Mans Mk.2 seats with the original foam design and T3 California seats, as well as V7 700 single seats and 750 Special and V7 700 dual seats for bikes made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The shop sources parts for the older Guzzis from around the world as well as supplying day to day essentials to keep more modern Guzzis on the road.

See gutsibits.co.uk

CCM SCRAMBLES SPITFIRES

CCM HAVE ANNOUNCED a second Spitfire model after the sell-out success of their roadster. The Spitfire Scrambler will be made in a limited edition run of just 250 and production will start in September at the company's Bolton factory.

The Scrambler uses the same hand-made frame and engine as the road bike, with a modified subframe to allow the fitting of a high-level exhaust. The Scrambler also has longer-travel fully-adjustable suspension. A bigger front wheel and dual purpose tyres are fitted, as are raised off-road handlebars, a two-tone seat and a sump guard, and the already pared down look of the Spitfire is even more sparse on the new model. The Scrambler will be priced for sale in the UK at £8995 plus £279 OTR charges. A £250 deposit will secure one of the 250 machines being made.

See ccm-motorcycles.com

Ducati sale rumours

INDIAN NEWSPAPERS REPORT that VW have approached Royal Enfield's parent company, Eicher Motors, in an attempt to sell them Italian manufacturer Ducati. VW's Audi subsidiary currently owns Ducati, and Reuters have reported that VW has asked investment bankers Evercore to look into selling Ducati along with other assets as it struggles to deal with the scandal over faked diesel emissions.

The Times of India says that VW has approached Eicher Motors, quoting unnamed sources, but Eicher's owner has declined to comment. Enfield are currently developing a range of machines with bigger engines than their own 350/500 Bullet singles, and a prototype 750cc twin has been spotted being tested on the streets of New Delhi. Ducati machines sold in India are made at the company's factory in Thailand.

If a buyer for Ducati cannot be found at VW's asking price of €1.5 billion, the Italian company could be floated on the stock market, says Reuters.

INZANITY
The unloved Laverda
P28

SWAMP THING
Drowned but not out
P48

SHOOTING STAR
The best BSA 500?
P32

LIGHTNING REFLEXES?

NEWLY-OPENED SPORTS AND classic bike dealership Lightning Quarter Garage is offering clubs and riding groups a free Scalextric set when they take part in a 'Bikes, Cars, Coffee and Cake' Saturday morning event. Pride of place in the showroom goes to a custom-built landscaped Scalextric track. While visitors are enjoying complimentary coffee, tea and cake, they can take turns in testing their slot racing skills. Each visitor will be timed over four laps and the fastest driver will take away a brand new Scalextric set of their own. Each event is organised exclusively for an invited club or prebooked group. To keep things manageable, groups are limited to 30 people.

Lightning Quarter Garage is an unconventional motorcycle dealership in many other ways. "We only sell bikes that excite us," says Mark Franklin, former head of MV Agusta UK and partner in the business with ex-MV and Triumph man Neil Webster. "If it doesn't make us buzz, it doesn't come through the door."

The result is an eclectic offering, currently ranging from a Ducati Panigale and Monster to TRX 850 and YZF750R Yamahas, Honda NS400R, Gilera Saturno 500 and a Harley-Davidson Aermacchi 350 Sprint street scrambler. As well as the Scalextric track, there is also a lounge with a library of motoring films, magazines and books, a growing gallery of original automotive artworks, prints and posters. A programme of events is also planned, designed to help customers enjoy their motorcycles. Also on-site are the Milk Churn coffee shop and the Firebird Brewery, which has a tasting bar and shop. To reserve an event for your club or group, contact Neil Webster on 01403 289719 or neil@lightningquartergarage. You'll find Lightning Quarter Garage at the Rudgwick Brickworks business park just off the A281.

See lightningquartergarage.com.

AUCTION ACTION AT THE NATIONAL MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM

CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE AUCTIONS are to become a regular event at the National Motorcycle Museum. H&H Classics, one of the top UK auction houses, is moving its motorcycle sales from Donington Park to the National Motorcycle Museum. The first sale will be held on June 1 and 2. This will be a long-term partnership, with H&H Classics holding three sales in 2017 at the Museum and a minimum of three a year in the future.

Dominic Lyncker, CEO of H&H Classics, says: "We have decided to raise the bar on our motorcycle sales by holding them at the most prestigious bike venue in the country. We are determined to make the name H&H Classics synonymous with the very best of motorcycle auctions, so the co-operation with this wonderful atmospheric venue allows us to offer our clients the best."

James Hewing, National Motorcycle Museum Director, said: "We are delighted to welcome H&H Classics auctions for their forthcoming motorcycle auctions. All those attending will enjoy an enhanced experience in terms of the world class facilities, not to mention having the chance to visit the museum collection."

Mark Bryan, Head of H&H Classics' Motorcycle Department, says: "When deciding to find a new sales venue there was really only one option if we wanted the best for clients and that was the National Motorcycle Museum. Where better to showcase the best motorcycles at auction in the UK? We look forward to a long and happy partnership with the museum."

See thenmm.co.uk

Top: The H&H Classics and NMM teams celebrate their new partnership with an Indian Four. Say, who's the lucky person who gets to ride pillion?

JAWA LAUNCHES NEW FOUR-STROKE SINGLES

CZECH MANUFACTURER JAWA is the latest established European name to look east for a new engine to keep up with the times. They have plumped for a 440cc Chinese engine for their new overhead Jawa design, which has a look based on the Jawa 350cc two-stroke twins that were mass produced in the 1970s and 1980s. The Jawa OHC complies with the new Euro 4 regulations which place higher demands on emission limits and safety. It's also equipped with ABS, a first for the brand.

The company has also revealed a new 660cc model which is similarly kitted out to resemble the old 1970s design. The Jawa Vintage uses the Italian-made water-cooled engine fitted to their Sportard model and has a monoshock and high level exhaust. It is not clear whether the new Jawa four-strokes will come to the UK, but the two-stroke models are still available in this country from F2 Motorcycles.

See jawamotorcycles.co.uk

Left: The 660cc Jawa Vintage also plays on traditional styling cues. As Jawa is now owned by Mahindra it's likely that these new four-strokes will be imported into India, but who knows if they'll come to the UK?

Right: The new Jawa OHC which uses a fuel-injected, 440cc, 26bhp powerplant built by Shineray. Top speed is likely to be around 75mph

A TASTY COMBINATION

VINTAGE MOTORCYCLES TOURS have launched epicurean road trips riding vintage motorcycles. Off the beaten track, on the roads of southern Europe, the riders will have a good time with friends riding mythical motorcycles of the 1970-80s. Based in Nice, Vintage Motorcycles Tours create custom-made road trips in France, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Switzerland and beyond. Their purpose is to allow riders to discover southern Europe in an epicurean style through roads, culture and Mediterranean gastronomy. The varied landscapes as well as the cultural wealth provide constant contrasts, while the temperate climate allows riding most of the year, offering a wide range of dates.

The VMT motorcycle fleet consists of 12 models including two Honda CB750s, Yamaha XT500, Yamaha RD350LC, Yamaha 1200 V-Max and a BMW R75/5. Riders will have the opportunity of changing motorcycles during the tours. This experience is also accessible to the spouses and friends who, even if they are not riders, can follow aboard a collectable car: Citroën 2CV, Triumph Spitfire or Jaguar E-Type. The tours include use of the motorcycles, guide, 3 to 5 star accommodation, petrol, restaurants, visits, luggage transfer and an assistance vehicle with an additional motorcycle.

See motorcyclestours.com

Concours in Cadsden

BUCKS BRITISH AND CLASSIC MCC will host their annual classic bike concours on Wednesday, June 21, starting at 7.30pm at the delightful country setting of The Plough at Cadsden, Princes Risborough, Bucks, HP27 0NB. There will be trophies, good food, beer and music and the show is for bikes only.

See bbcmcc.freeuk.com.

FIVE CAMERAS EARN MILLIONS FROM SPEEDERS

THE NATION'S HIGHEST earning speed cameras have been revealed as part of new research from Carole Nash Insurance Consultants. The insurance broker submitted freedom of information requests to the UK's largest county police constabularies. The results reveal which speed cameras have caught the most instances of motorists breaking the speed limit over one year and highlight UK roads where motorists are advised to take extra care. All the highest earning cameras are on motorways or dual carriageways. Motorways are considered the safest roads in the UK, however fatalities in accidents on motorways are more likely because of the high speeds involved.

The data revealed Britain's five highest earning speed cameras were:

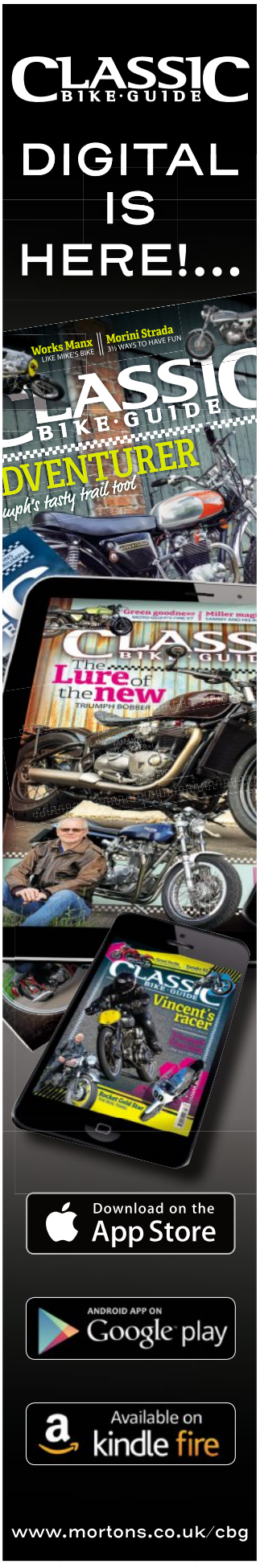
1. A1 Great Ponton Northbound, Lincolnshire – £606,400
2. M180 West of River Trent, Scunthorpe – £583,500
3. M25 London Orbital junction 17-18, Rickmansworth – £538,500
4. M25 London Orbital between junction 5 and Clacket Lane Services – £373,300
5. A12 Stratford St Mary, Essex Southbound – £305,400

Located just south of Grantham in Lincolnshire, motorists driving northbound along this stretch of the A1 racked up the most fines in the UK. The camera charged an average of £1,661 a day in just one year, making it one of the most lucrative cameras in the country.

Bikers and drivers travelling along the M180 close to Scunthorpe are also prone to speeding, with a camera on this stretch of road, west of the River Trent, racking up 5,853 speeding offences in a year.

A camera between junctions 17 and 18 of the M25, close to Rickmansworth, was responsible for 5,385 speeding tickets in one year, with motorists travelling an average of 62mph in the 50mph zone. A camera between junction 5 and Clacket Lane Services on the London Orbital issued 3,723 fines to motorists who were averaging 61mph on this 50 mph stretch of road.

Rebecca Donohue, head of marketing at Carole Nash, said: "With some speed cameras issuing tickets that amount to well into the hundreds of thousands it's understandable that, at times, motorists feel like they are being taxed again. It's really important to remember that such cameras are put in place to reduce accidents and save the lives of motorists and bikers, something which is far more important than any amount of money. We wanted to find out which roads are prone to speeding motorists to help raise awareness of the dangers in those areas and encourage bikers and drivers alike to take extra care on these roads."



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Size matters

When you visit the world's largest classic bike show, timing is important too...

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME **PHOTOS BY** CHRIS DICKINSON AND OLIVER HULME

THE SHEER SCALE of Stafford or, to give the event its proper title, the 37th Carole Nash International *Classic Motor Cycle* Show is, for the uninitiated, something to behold. This show is big. Really big. You need an early start and a day to get around the whole thing and even that might not be enough. The halls are well laid out and there was plenty of elbow room even at the show's peak hour, about 11am – the spring sunshine might have had a good deal to do with this. The layout placed the very best private entries slap-bang in the middle of the main hall, along with the bigger club stands, with a healthy mix of entries and exhibits dotted around the other halls.

Club members were happy to talk the finer points of their preferred marque and expert technical advice was on hand from dozens of traders.

Outside the autojumble was, if not frenzied, certainly buzzing with activity, however the stalls were outnumbered by those selling spares, projects and complete motorcycles indoors. The prize for being quick off the mark went to the visitor who snapped up the first bike of the day at 9.03am on Saturday. Some of the asking prices were decidedly optimistic, while others seemed reasonable.

As well as the main halls, there was a *Classic Dirt Bike* display too and that contained many a fine dual-purpose machine, including a particularly splendid BSA B50 roadster.

You had to feel a little sorry for any seller pitched next to the racing paddock, where a weekend-long battle was going on between the teams of restored Japanese racer owners who revved their machines to an angry howl. In response, this brought the primeval bellow of half a dozen Rocket 3 and Trident racers ripping through the air.

The BSA Gold Star Owners' Club built a Gold Star in front of an audience over the course of the

EVENT SHOW REPORT

The next classic bike show at Stafford is on October 14/15. See staffordclassicbikeshows.com

weekend, GP star Troy Bayliss entertained crowds and there were two Best in Show bikes, a pair of immaculate AJS singles that you would have trouble telling apart. A gorgeous 1969 Triumph T120 Bonneville took Best Classic, while the Rudge Club members, resplendent in crisp white overalls and period fur took the honours for the best club stand.

SALE DAY

BONHAMS' AUCTION ON Sunday afternoon was a restrained exercise in tension while hundreds of bikes, from Kawasaki racers to a Bradbury, went under the hammer. The big noise of the day was made by a barn-find Vincent White Shadow. This was one of only 20 bikes of its kind built, so called because in its original form it had polished engine cases. Although it looked tired and worn, the White Shadow was sold for c£165,000 including fees to a buyer in the USA. At the more modest end of the scale, a 1966 James Superswift fetched £2875 all-in.

A Triumph Tiger Trail went for £10,350 while a Triumph Bonneville Executive limped up to £3750. A whole slew of Nortons, AJS and Matchless twins, many in running but unrestored condition, saw the gavel go down around the £4/5000 mark. While a 1973 MV Agusta made £66,500, a pair of the same company's desirable 350 twins only just made it over £4000.

TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE

THIS 750 BONNIE is a clever pastiche that makes you look twice. While under the skin it is a standard 1980 T140, the bike has been styled to look as much as possible like a late 1950s T120. The sidepanels have been changed to the more classic rounded shape and the bike has been given a period, early 1960s-style paint job reminiscent of Ford's GT40 racing car. It has alloy rims, period shock absorbers, a 1950s seat, a Rocket Gold Star tail-light and much of the original chrome and alloy has been painted black. Electronic ignition keeps it going, and stainless steel brake cylinders help it to stop.

JAWA 600

THIS ROTAX-ENGINED SPECIAL looks a lot like a bike Jawa should be building. It's described by owner and builder Ian, who created it in tribute to his late wife Paula, as a 'work in progress'. This machine uses an electric-start 600cc single taken from a CCM. Jawa originally stuck a Rotax engine into one of the first bikes they made following the collapse of communism – a stock loop frame with the tank and ancillaries from the old 350cc two-stroke twin and a 500 Rotax engine shoehorned inside as the company tried to modernise its range.

Ian took the bodywork from a later Jawa 350 Classic – which you can buy today from F2 Motorcycles along with a version of the old style 350. The nose fairing, which includes Jawa's digital speedo, comes from a Gilera DNA 125 sports scooter and the swinging arm from a CZ motocrosser. It also has Tec shock absorbers; all the lights have been changed to LED items, and a fork brace has been fitted. The original 500cc Rotax engined Jawa produced around 33bhp but the CCM lump has boosted that to an impressive 54bhp.

Ian also has a replica CZ enduro bike he's built out of the bigger Jawa frame, and uses the Rotax-engined roadster to raise money for Weston Park Hospital.

SUZUKI GT750

THIS IMMACULATE KETTLE has been owned by Pete since 1973, but of course it didn't always look this spectacular. Pete is the second owner – it was bought in January 1973 by a mate, who within three months had lost his licence and Pete became his chauffeur, eventually buying the GT. He rode it for the rest of the decade, including on a trek to Gibraltar and Morocco, until 1981, covering about 45,000 miles in total when the bike was parked up outside his mum's house and abandoned.

"I got a bit fed up with it and basically it just dissolved." Like many a once-loved but then neglected motorcycle, the GT750 endured years of being parked in the road, moved into sheds and shoved to the back of garages while Pete assured everyone he would restore it one day. He never let go of any part of it, despite multiple offers for the big four-leading-shoe front brake, which is much sought after by classic racers in classes that don't permit the use of discs.

He spent four years rebuilding it, finally being pushed into completing the build when his wife Yvonne printed invitations for his 60th birthday party which said that the completed bike would be unveiled at the same time. And it was, to the astonishment of most of Pete's friends who hadn't been aware of the quality of the rebuild. The finishing touch was getting a decal maker to reproduce the original dealer sticker on the rear mudguard.

Since then the GT has been to multiple shows, picking up rosettes at many. The bike's original owner has been asking for another ride ever since, something that Pete has yet to agree to.

NORTON SINGLE

THIS RIGID NORTON might look utterly original, but it is not what it seems. Mike Pemberton of Pushrod Performance built the Norton entirely from parts that he has been amassing for the past 15 years. He wanted a prewar style Norton with a rigid frame and girder forks and was only able to lay his hands on the frame last year. Mike believes it's a new old stock prewar 16H item returned from Australia and he paid £650 for it. The forks are off a 1948 Model 18 and the petrol tank came from a Model 7 from the early 1950s. The gearbox is an upright item from the early 1940s and the engine is a standard 1960 ES2 which got the project started 15 years ago. The primary drive and chaincase are from a late model ES2.

After fitting a new BT-H magneto, the bike fired up second kick. The wheels and hubs are as fitted to Norton Dominators to improve the braking potential. So far the completed bike has covered 12 miles – and is about to be taken apart again for a new paint job, the fitting of a 520cc short-stroke engine and a high output alternator to improve the lights.

SILK 700

THEY DIDN'T MAKE a lot of Silk motorcycles, but the bikes which were built made a distinct impression on anyone who saw them when they were first released. The Silk 700S is a water-cooled stroker, based on the Scott two-stroke twin and built by George Silk in Derby. Originally known as a Scott Silk, a dispute over the ownership of the design prevented Silk from making Scott engines under licence so he developed his own. A new two-stroke engine was developed by David Midgelow and George Silk, with the help of Gordon Blair of Queen's University, Belfast, who optimised the porting with the aid of new-fangled computer programs.

The Silk 700S was launched in 1975 and featured the new engine in a steel tubular frame – a design with just two bends in it made by Spondon, who also made the forks, yokes and brakes. Yet along with the cutting-edge tech, the Silk was fitted with a Velocette gearbox turned on its side. Even so, the Silks looked ridiculously ahead of their time for a British motorcycle. Priced at launch at £1355 it was very expensive, yet despite a series of rapid price rises Silk lost £200 on every bike they sold. This Silk is one of the last made and like all the 158 Silks it was built to order. It was the lowest spec, being fitted with a single disc front brake, spoked wheels and without a grab rail. Owner Lewis says the engine is extremely torquey. With a very light engine in a stiff frame with a low centre of gravity the Silk is "ridiculously good fun to ride."

SPECIAL BREWS

A selection of stunning home-brewed specials took pride of place at the show, and generated plenty of astonished double-takes…

BRIDGESTONE 350 GTR

IT TOOK AN innovative genius to build a motorcycle that would stand out in the flood of machines that came out of Japan in the 1960s. The Bridgestone 350 GTR is one of those machines, ahead of its time and packed with original thinking. The Bridgestone had a top speed of 105mph when it was released in 1967. It's rumoured that the company lost money on every GTR they sold, which is why production stopped in 1972. It's also rumoured that the company's designs were so sophisticated that the other Japanese manufacturers were embarrassed by them and, given that Bridgestone had a supply contract to provide rubber for most Japanese bikes at the time, pressure was put on the company to end production.

A 349.9cc rotary disc valve oil injected two-stroke engine has a carburettor mounted on each end of the crankshaft and an alternator driven from the crank to the rear of the cylinders. It has 12V electrics and you can swap the gear shift and rear brake around from side to side so the rider can choose the configuration he or she likes best. Less successful was the gearshift – a six-down arrangement that confuses many riders. The GTR could do a standing quarter in 12 seconds – faster than most four-stroke 650s of the time. And it looked like a gleaming rocket ship.

Bill bought the GTR at Stafford last year as a project and spent a year restoring it. Bridgestones were never officially imported into the UK, and the bike came in as an unrestored import. Bill believes the engines were made for Bridgestone by car maker Datsun, now Nissan, and he says that the rarity value of the GTR means he will never sell it. "I buy and sell a lot of bikes, but I'm going to keep this one," he said. "I think I'd have a job finding another."

HONDA GOLDTHING

OWNER CHRIS CREATED a remarkable Honda Gold Wing adventure bike using BMW and Aprilia parts. The stock Honda Gold Wing front end was fitted with extended forks and, while the Honda frame remains intact, it's been fitted with a custom built swinging arm and a Suzuki Hayabusa shock absorber. The rear end comes from an Aprilia, while the tank and bodywork come from a BMW.

Chris has ridden the bike across Europe; his longest journey being a cross-continent trek to the Czech republic. Asked what it was like to ride on the rough, Chris said it was "absolutely terrifying off-road. I dropped it once and nearly gave myself a hernia picking it up again."

ARIEL BLEADER

THE NORTH WILTS Motorcycle Club brought along the late Pete Sole's BSA-Ariel Bleader, a hybrid of a BSA Bantam with an Ariel Golden Arrow 250 engine. The bike is rumoured to have been built by BSA apprentices. They mated the engine to the frame by bending the front down tube on a Bantam D10 which had been returned to the factory after a warranty-covered blow up.

Pete widened the tank to suit the bigger engine and built his own air filter box. The whole creation is so expertly done that it looks like a production bike and makes you wonder what might have happened if BSA had produced it for sale to compete with Yamaha and Suzuki two-stroke twins instead of shoehorning Tiger Cub engines into the Bantam frame. The Bleader proudly bears a sticker pointing out that the bike has survived a road test by Jim Reynolds for this very magazine.

SUNBEAM S16

MARTYN BRATBY CREATED his double-engined 1951 Sunbeam S8 over 18 months and he built it because he wanted an Indian inline four but couldn't afford one. "I bought an S8 cheaply and I found a few spare engines, so I thought I'd make my own four."

Frame and tank were stretched and most of the engineering was done by Martyn himself. Two Sunbeam S8 engines, chosen because there are more S8 engines about than S7 engines, are mated together using a home designed and built version of an Oldham Coupling. This has two discs that rotate and two tongues, mounted at 90 degrees to each other, which engage and slide up and down together (the original Oldham Coupling was designed in 1827 for use on paddle steamers). The two engines operated semi-independently, with the timing on the front engine governed to fit the timing on the rear. Martyn built his own four spark distributor operating off the rear engine's camshaft to provide ignition.

He says the engine does experience a small flat spot, which he is trying to iron out, and he rode the Sunbeam 150 miles to the show.

HYDE HARRIER

TUCKED AWAY AT the back of the Trident and Rocket 3 Owners' Club stand was this bang up to the minute 988cc Hyde Harrier BSA Rocket 3. As well as the big bore kit, which takes the 750 triple engine out almost as far as it can go, the Hyde Harrier has the trademark Harris frame as well as Megacycle cams and a Newby clutch. Although it was originally built as a track bike, owner Ian put compact lights on front and rear and rides it on the road. "It's just about road legal," he says.

Thanks to the engine modifications the triple pulls strongly across the rev range from as low as 2500rpm. Öhlins shocks and Öhlins forks from an Aprilia keep things suspended and the brake calipers are from a Suzuki GSX-R1000. The hubs and yokes were custom built. The Hyde has the same rake as a Yamaha R1, which Ian, a Triumph 955i rider, says makes it handle and perform like a modern bike. The carbonfibre bodywork is hand-made, with slightly thicker foam on the seat to compensate for a dodgy knee which was making gear changing uncomfortable.

The running of a classic motorcycle is a constant battle no matter what the breed, and the Hyde is no exception – fuelling problems at present mean the bike is running rich on its regular jaunts round the Lake District. This makes things a little thirsty – the Hyde only manages around 70 miles to a tankful.

TRIUMPH QUADRENT

IN THE DYING DAYS of BSA-Triumph, the factory produced several four-cylinder versions of the three-cylinder Trident. One such prototype resides in the National Motorcycle Museum. Specials builder and triple enthusiast George Pooley has built his own Quadrent (sic) and it is a well known show stopper. A left-hand cylinder and crankcase have been mated to two central cases and cylinders and then to the same right-hand set up. The camshafts were a spare set of pre-production items which departed the prototype department of the factory out of the back door as the end came, while the valves also left the collapsing company in the pocket of one of the engineers. With understatement typical of a skilled engineer, George said: "I turned the crankshaft out of billet." Easy when you say it quickly.

While the Quadrent looks at first glance as if it is a Triumph T160, the engine actually sits in a modified 1969 Triumph Bonneville T120 frame. George built the Quadrent in 2003/4. It's road legal and gets regular outings on track days too. It sounds markedly different to a stock Trident. He says the four is "dead comfortable and a beautiful bike to ride." CBG

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EVENT
HILL CLIMB
PREVIEW

Historic hill climb

WORDS BY FRANK MELLING **PHOTOS BY** CAROL MELLING

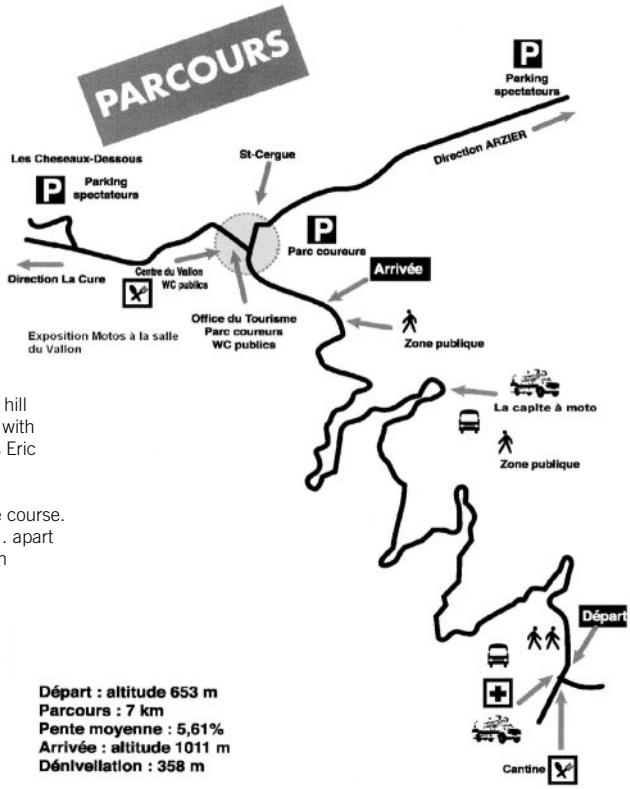
THIS HILL CLIMB 'demonstration' is one of the best kept secrets in the classic motorcycling world. Rétro Moto St-Cergue also offers a huge display of classic race bikes and an enormous celebratory meal rolled into one enormous festival. And, incredibly, spectating is free.

St-Cergue is a tiny village which sits up in the Vaud mountains, 22 miles from Geneva. It's worth going to St-Cergue just for the view overlooking Lac Leman and on to the Haute-Savoie. However, although the village is picture postcard pretty, the key attraction for motorcyclists is that St-Cergue is at the end of the Route de Nyon which snakes up from the valley below.

At one time, St-Cergue was the finish of a full-on racing hill climb which dates back to 1901 when four bikes and 28 cars battled their way up a 10km course. Races were held on and off for many years, until 1934 when this historic hill went into retirement. Then in 2001, over a glass of wine or ten, a group of bike enthusiasts had the idea of running a retrospective event using the same, spectacular, Nyon to St-Cergue road. Every two years, the event still takes place but now uses a shortened course of 4.34 miles.

Above: At this historic hill climb, café racers mix it with full-on GP bikes. Here is Eric Zwygart and his Harley

Right: The map of the course. Entirely straightforward… apart from the odd bend or ten



Above: This might look like a classic sidecar GP but in fact it's a 'gentle demonstration'. Honest

Right: If the number of 'genuine works Hondas' in circulation today is anything to go by, the factory must have made thousands of the things

Spectator entry is completely free but Rétro Moto St-Cergue is a charity event so it's expected that you will drop a few francs into the collecting boxes. Camping in the paddock is also free but this does get very packed with the 250 competitors, so you need to be there early on the day before the Saturday kick-off. The paddock camping is in the local park so it has no professional facilities but there are showers and immaculate toilets in the adjacent sports centre. This palatial building also houses a fabulous display of race bikes over the Friday and Saturday of the event. Again, admission is free.

There are plenty of spectator viewing points and you really can get close enough to see the whites of the rider's eyes. Riders get three runs up the hill and they campaign everything from prewar sidecar outfits to post-classic GP bikes. Don't confuse the concept of a 'demonstration' with riding up the hill at 5mph, waving to the crowd. The Swiss concept of demos is very much full on.

The event finishes with a wonderful, informal dinner in the sports hall and there is a charge of SF40 for this: tickets must be pre-booked via the event website. The food is good, the wine flows and there are a lot of tearful speeches which combine to make a brilliant end to an event which represents the very best of classic motorcycling.

St-Cergue is around 450 miles from Calais but don't believe Google Maps when it gives a time of six hours – not unless you have a deep pocket to pay the French Gendarmerie. On a classic bike, it's a solid 12-hour ride which is much more fun if you spread it over two days. Make sure that you come into St-Cergue through the tiny French town of Les Rousses, rather than western Geneva and so avoid buying a Swiss motorway vignette at a current cost of £32 – applicable even if you travel only a few miles.

And finally the bad news. Entries fill up for Rétro Moto about ten seconds after they open so there is no chance of getting a ride for this year's event on Saturday, June 17. However, you can ride up and down the same hill as many times as you wish the day after Rétro Moto – and it's worth the trip just to do this. CBG

See retro-moto.ch

Above: Not all St-Cergue participants go full-on flat-out. Here are Marcel Neuffer and Julien Baumgartner with their lovely 500 Honda outfit

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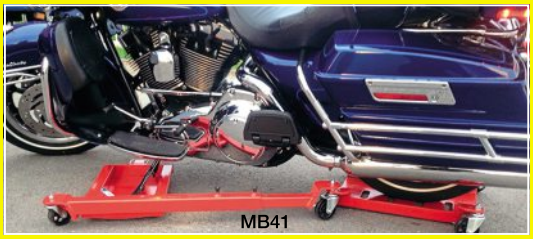
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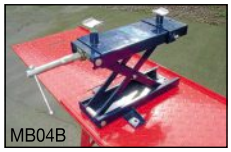
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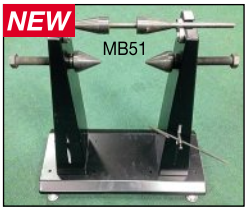
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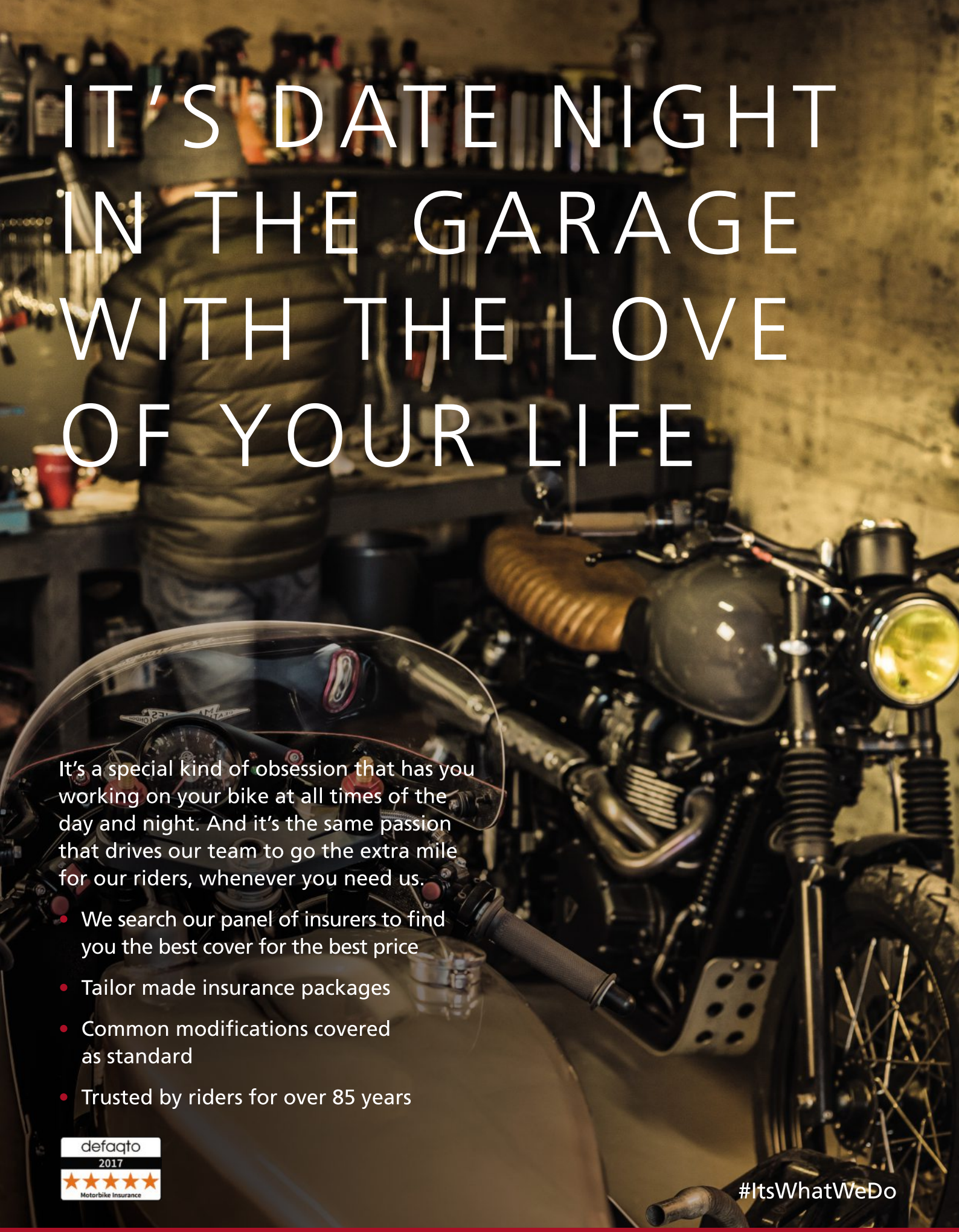

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Desert stormer

It's not a Nomad by name, but this Norton tourer has clocked up a quarter-million miles anyway

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY OLIVER HULME

Above: The Atlas is a remarkably subdued machine, as was the Norton way. The Commando which followed was a little less restrained

1: Neat single carb conversion, so just the one Monobloc, complete with a float bowl extension with an elderly see-through cover

2: The Atlas's tacho drive once had to be fixed 'in the field' using a tent pole. It now sports a more permanent repair

3: The lead which has been wound around the spokes works as both a wheel balancing weight and a handy store of electrical solder, allegedly

4: The original kickstarter has been modified to fold up. You can see the original Lucas competition lurking in the background. It's provided 250,000 miles of sparks. That's not entirely unreliable

REPUTATIONS ARE part and parcel of classic motorcycle ownership. Reputation says that 1960s Bonnevilles are brilliant and oil in frame 1970 Bonnevilles are unreliable and leaky. Kawasaki triples don't handle. A Ducati is hard to live with. Norton's 750 Atlas has a reputation for not being as good as its 650 Dominator sisters. Popular lore says the Atlas is vibratory, over-stressed, bulky and unreliable.

It was a stopgap, says the legend, a bike that sat uncomfortably between the Dominator and the Commando. It was built for Americans who wanted a big engine on a big bike – a mile eater. The Atlas was the last-but-one Norton to feature the featherbed frame and had the penultimate incarnation of Bert Hopwood's original 1940s 497cc Dominator engine which had been stretched out to 745cc, later to become the Commando 750 and 850.

The Atlas's reputation for vibration and unreliability is given the lie by this 1965 example. Ginger's Atlas has done a quarter of a million miles. It's been as far as India, around the Soviet bloc and has been ridden over the Atlas Mountains and halfway across the Sahara off-road, following the desert telegraph wires with the bellmouths on the carbs sucking talcum-powder fine sand into the engine. Halfway across the desert nomad tribesmen advised him not to travel further if he wanted to survive – and he took their advice, riding back to Morocco.

The Atlas is largely as Ginger bought it in 1969, barring a replaced tank and seat, and being officially written off twice. On one occasion after a head-on collision with an Italian ambulance an insurance inspector decided the frame was bent, However, Ginger thinks that the inspector simply measured it from the wrong points and there was nothing actually wrong with it. The unmarked paintjob on the frame is original and looks as good as it would have done when the Atlas rolled out of Burrage Grove.

Ginger thinks that the Atlas owes some of its superb condition to its origins as a factory prepared special. The first time this machine saw the light of day was on the Norton stand at the Earls Court Motorcycle Show

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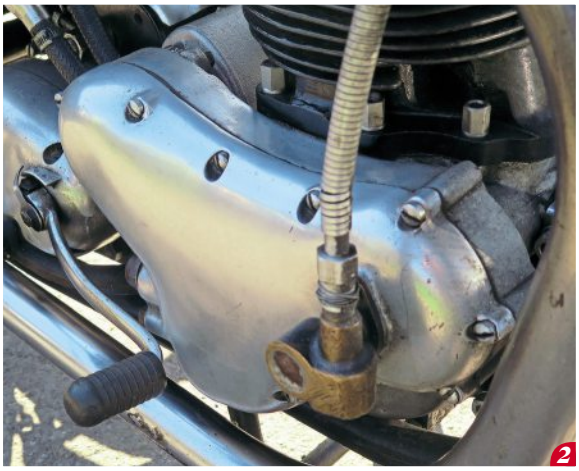
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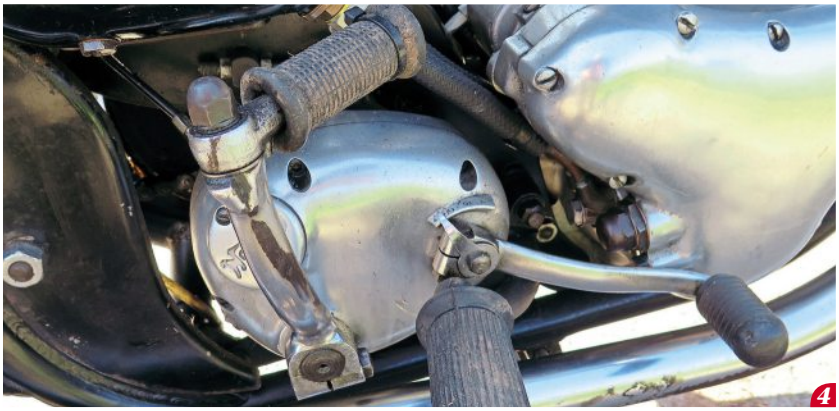
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in 1965, hitched to a Watsonian Palma sidecar, and it could be that Norton made a special effort to prepare the bike for public view. Even so, having been hit head-on by a speeding Italian ambulance and hacked across half a desert you would have expected it to have suffered, but whatever Norton did to it seems to have stuck.

It's not even that big by modern standards – sitting on the Atlas and taking the flat bars in both hands, it certainly doesn't feel like a 750. A Japanese 400 from the 1980s feels bigger. The Norton is compact, with nothing on board that isn't essential for rapid, rather than fast, forward progress.

Ginger paid £100 for it in 1969, having tried to persuade the owner for the previous two years to part with it. The sidecar came with it, though it had by then been detached, and Ginger sold that for £45 – so the Atlas stands him just £55.

The 73mm by 89mm motor on the Atlas ran lower compression than the Dominator's at 7.6:1 and was fitted at first with a single 376 Amal monobloc carb. In 1964 the Atlas gained 12V electrics and an alternator; an extra carb and wider yokes, with the UK version having a bigger tank, flat bars and a rev counter.

Although this machine had a pair of carbs originally, it is now fitted with a single item with a faded plastic see-through float bowl cover. The twin carbs suffered badly from the fine dust in the desert and were replaced when the slides started to rattle from side to side so loudly that the clattering noise could be heard above the engine. Ginger experimented with rudimentary filtration in the desert by sticking a sock over each bellmouth, but found they restricted the engine's breathing so he took them off.

On his return to the UK Ginger says the engine was on its knees, and a fine crust of impacted dust had collected on top of the pistons. He still finds dusty evidence of his desert trek on the bike today. Ginger says his Atlas doesn't suffer too much from the legendary vibration, something he puts down to proper care of the various engine mountings and rubber bushes.

The Atlas uses Norton's standard big bike four-speed gearbox and heavy-duty clutch, Roadholder

PRICE GUIDE
£7500 TO £12,000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Avoid issues with vibes by not over-revving the engine: treat the Atlas like the long-legged tourer it is, rather than a sports machine. Single carb conversion worth considering for less hassle and smoother running

ALSO CONSIDER
Norton's later Commando: the Isolastic system kills vibes and it's an all-round better bike. Royal Enfield Interceptor Mk.2, another beefy 750 Brit twin, arguably better looking. Or go for three cylinders with BSA's Rocket 3

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Above: Never let anyone tell you that old Britbikes aren't practical transport. This 750 twin has 250,000 miles on its clock and it's ready to roll on the next adventure

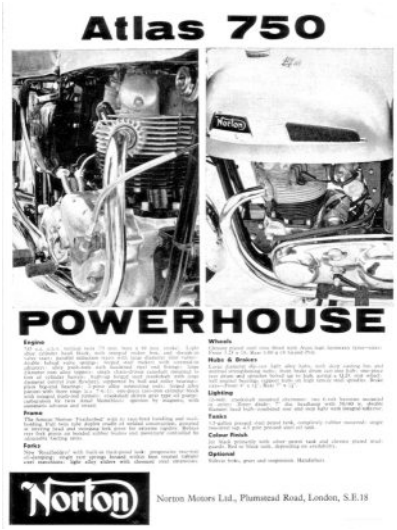
forks and originally had adjustable Girling rear shocks fitted onto the slimline featherbed frame. Ginger spent many long hours on the road riding one-handed, so much so that the bike's original seat became lopsided because his weight was on the left.

The Lucas magneto failed in Casablanca. Ginger believes it was the 110 degree heat and the location of the magneto behind the engine which caused the solder to melt. Back in 1973 the RAC was called and shipped out a replacement magneto, which turned out to be for a 1956 Dominator. It was fitted and worked well enough to get the Atlas home, but a stiff letter of complaint was sent to the RAC. The original magneto was sent off to Lucas for repair and reconditioning. Lucas engineers, after dismantling the device and re-soldering the connections, could not find anything wrong with it. It was refitted and has been in place ever since.

The engine has had three sets of barrels, all bored out to their limits, with pistons lasting up to 50,000 miles and every crank regrind possible within the limits of replacement main bearings.

A 7500 mile trek to India was trouble-free, barring a broken clutch cable and a failed rev counter drive which was fixed with a small section of metal tent pole on a Yugoslavian campsite, where Ginger's long hair and big British motorcycle were viewed with awe by the locals.

"It's a standard British road bike, and I'd take it anywhere," he says. "I once rode it from Berlin to Cheltenham, leaving on a Saturday lunchtime and was back home in the pub by Sunday evening, singing as I came down the hill into town. If anyone had challenged me I'd have turned around and done it again. Any motorcycle that makes you feel like that has to be a great bike." CBG


Atlas 750

POWERHOUSE

Norton

Norton Motors Ltd., Plumstead Road, London, S.E.18

MANUFACTURED: 1962-1968 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv vertical twin **BORE/STROKE:** 73 x 89mm **CAPACITY:** 745cc **COMPRESSION:** 7.6:1 **POWER:** 55bhp @ 6500rpm **CARBURETTORS:** Amal Monobloc **IGNITION:** Lucas K2F magneto **ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:** Alternator, 12V **LUBRICATION:** Dry sump **CLUTCH:** Wet multiplate **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Chain **FINAL DRIVE:** Chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 8in drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7in drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Roadholder forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin adjustable Girling shocks **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 4.25 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 55.5in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31in **WEIGHT:** 408lb **TOP SPEED:** 119mph

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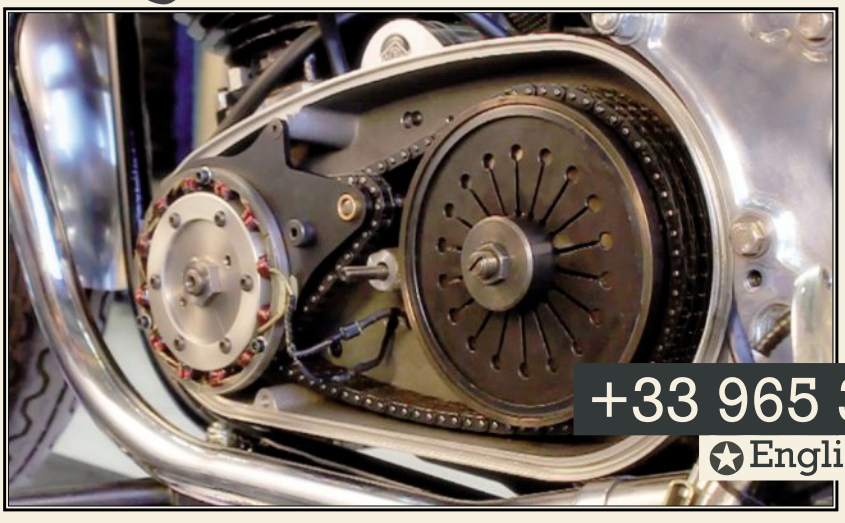

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Above: There were at least five versions of Laverda's last-gasp 750. The first 'S' was half-faired, then the 'Carenata' came with a dual seat and full fairing. The ultimate incarnation was the 'Formula' with engine tweaks that pushed power up the rev range and made it into a right rasper

1: Behind the bubble. Everything you need is here, including the vital coolant temp gauge. Ignore that at your peril

2: Like Ducati's twins from two decades ago, the Zane-built Laverdas steer superbly. And, just like the smaller Ducatis, they struggled on the straights against the 140bhp four-cylinder Japanese opposition…

3: It even boasts a grabrail, should you wish to affect the fine handling by carting someone around with you

4: Stopping swiftly was never a problem. 320mm double Brembo discs easily manage the momentum of the 185kg machine

Utterly inZane?

As a bargain-buy, high-performance classic, Laverda's 750 superbike makes a strange kind of sense

WORDS & PHOTOS BY PAUL MILES

LAVERDA, LIKE MANY OTHER Italian motorcycle companies, has seen its fortunes wax and wane several times over the years. The Breganze factory, famous for its thunderous triples, finally abandoned motorcycle manufacture in the early 1980s, leaving thousands of Laverdisiti bereft.

Around 1992, after a break of over a decade, new investment from the Zanini group (and subsequently industrialist and two-wheeled enthusiast Francesco Tognon) was found and Laverda rose from the ashes with a completely new model, the mid-size 650 Sport, built in the town of Zane.

At the time this market segment was popular and 600cc sporting class machines were among the best-sellers worldwide. It made sense for the new company to avoid a re-hash of the horribly outdated, litre-plus triple so associated with the Laverda name. Instead, it launched a new, cutting edge sportster complete with a high revving, air-cooled, eight valve twin, based on the old company's horribly outdated 500cc twin, the Alpino.

At first glance, this might be considered as an unwise move. However, the knowledge and tooling already existed for the twin. By increasing the capacity to 668cc, plus further tuning and fuel injection, the new Zane Laverda claimed a reasonable 70bhp. In order to make the most of this admittedly modest power, a brand new chassis design was commissioned from none other than Nico Bakker. The twin-spar aluminium frame was light and stiff and, coupled with the very best of Italian suspension by Paoli, Brembo brakes and lightweight Marchesini wheels, the rest of the new machine read like a Who's Who of two-wheeled excellence. Even the bodywork was Kevlar.

The air/oil-cooled 668s were initially well received and praised for their excellent handling and usable performance. A slightly higher tuned Formula model soon followed, finished throughout in jet black. However, for the rider to make the sort of progress the looks suggested, the motor (first designed over 20 years earlier, remember) needed to be mercilessly

1

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3

4

thrashed. This inevitably led to mechanical problems including valve seat recession, main bearings starved of oil and failing engine balancers. Throw into the mix the usual electrical mishaps almost always present in an Italian bike and the outcome was a machine best described as 'flawed'.

Nevertheless, the 650 proved sufficiently well received for Zane to move to the next stage, a water-cooled 750 twin. Promising the sort of power expected from a three-quarter-litre machine, the new engine was designed to be more reliable than its air-cooled predecessor but was still, essentially, based around the ancient Alpino bottom end.

The 750s were launched in 1996, with a factory claimed 85bhp from the new motor (with up to 95 for the Formula version). The chassis and suspension, already excellent, were little changed. In order to try and grab a slice of the newly popular unfaired market, they even offered naked Ghost models. From the point of view of reliability, the liquid-cooled 750s are generally thought of as being more reliable than the early 650s, but some problems persisted. In order to go quickly (its natural competitor was the sublime Ducati 748) the twin still required revs: lots of them. It soon emerged that standard oil filtration was unequal to the task and bottom ends began to fail on hard-ridden machines. Electrical ancillaries continued to disappoint and parts availability became erratic. Owning a Zane Laverda had become a labour of love with heart ruling the head until eventually, in 2000, the factory closed its doors for a second time.

As a result of this ignominious failure, Zane Laverdas are considered a very poor alternative to the original Breganze machines; themselves very far from perfect, ironically. Being made in the 1990s, the Zane style is too 'new' for the traditional classic enthusiast, but too old for the modern rider. As a consequence, current prices are extremely low for what is a hand-built Italian sportsbike dripping with exotic components. It is quite possible to purchase a clean Zane twin for under £3000.

Largely due to the potential of their impeccable chassis, they were raced extensively, with inevitable engine development taking place to improve performance and reliability. An upgraded aftermarket oil filtration system resolves most of the engine problems associated with the 750 motor, and relatively simple adjustments like moving the reg/rec out from ➧

PRICES
£2800 to £3800
(Standard 750S)

FAULTS & FOIBLES
This is a stripped-down sportbike so don't expect much in the way of comfort on long hauls. Spares supply and specialist knowledge limited; eBay is your friend. Later water pump has bigger seals, bearings and impeller shaft – replaces weaker original components. If changing the water pump, also fit the improved balance shaft. Likewise, filters and efficiency on later fuel pumps tweaked so throw away early ones (also reduces the load on the battery). Don't pay 'Formula' prices for a straight S

ALSO CONSIDER
Ducati 748: Much broader selection, better spares and specialist support (but probably just as needy as they age). Yamaha TRX850: the 'Japanese Italian' which makes brilliant use of the TDM twin engine in a trellis frame; more reliable, more choice, affordable. Norton F1: the British superbike; only for people with big budgets…

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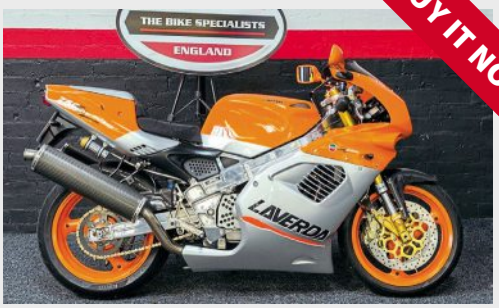

The 'Formula' is the ultimate incarnation of Laverda's parallel twin, with even more tricksy suspension, beefed up brakes, solo seat, performance exhaust and hot cams. It still comes at a price: this one is up for £7980 at The Bike Specialists in Sheffield

Above: Black. Also orange in places and with considerable noise. Sorry – brio, that should have read. A genuine Italian animal, for almost sensible money. Do not be inZane…

under the seat and into the breeze reduces the chances of being stranded due to an electrical fault.

This particular machine, a 1997 750S, is typical of the sporting range. It has carbon-clad Termignoni 'silencers' taken from the limited edition Formula model, plus one or two other carbon fibre accessories. It is precisely the sort of machine you might expect to find on sale today… for Tiger Cub money.

The entire machine exudes quality, with vast amounts of machined aluminium and suspension tech on display. Actually getting it to start is another known foible and the finger has been pointed at the sidestand cut-out switch, starter leads of insufficient thickness, a too-puny battery and poor relay. When you press the button, the starter motor sometimes feels like it doesn't have the oomph to spin the engine over compression; exactly the same issue is noticeable with similar-era Ducati twins. The answer then, as now, is to press the starter in a series of short bursts, a little like easing a big single over on the kickstarter. The bike then fires easily, settling to a steady idle.

The 750S is an extremely small machine with a surprisingly comfortable riding position, far less extreme than a Ducati and more akin to a sports 600 from the Japanese. The 750 is punchy, as only a big parallel twin can be, but revs very quickly. This encourages the rider to use all of the rev counter's range, with real power feeding in almost like a two-stroke beyond 6000rpm. The stunning bicycle is more than up to the job of coping with the claimed horses and the rider can simply get on with the job of attacking the corners, safe in the knowledge that, if any bike can, this one will.

It's hard to believe that a motorcycle which looks and rides as well as this can remain 'cheap' for much longer. It has all the elements of the 'future classic' about it, including rarity, looks, country of origin, plus, of course, that delicious exhaust soundtrack. Riding in a slightly more restrained manner (and not unfeelingly allowing the rev-counter needle to bounce off the stop) should improve longevity. Used often, but respectfully and keeping on top of regular maintenance, the Zane Laverda makes a compelling argument for inclusion into the classic collection. Prices are beginning to rise, but they are still excellent value. Get one while you can. CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1997 to 2002 **ENGINE:** Liquid-cooled dohc eight-valve parallel twin **BORE / STROKE:** 83mm x 69mm **CAPACITY:** 747cc **COMPRESSION:** 11.5:1 **POWER:** 85bhp @ 9000rpm **TORQUE:** 55lb-ft @ 7500rpm **TRANSMISSION:** six-speed, chain drive **FRAME:** Aluminium twin beam **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Paioli USD 3-way adjustable tele forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, Paioli three-way adjustable monoshock **FRONT BRAKE:** 2 x 320mm disc, four-piston calipers **REAR BRAKE:** 245mm disc, two-piston caliper **FRONT TYRE:** 120/70 ZR17 **REAR TYRE:** 170/60 ZR17 **SEAT HEIGHT:** 770mm **WEIGHT:** 185kg dry **ACCELERATION:** 11.9s quarter mile **FUEL CONSUMPTION:** 38mpg average **TOP SPEED:** 140mph

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WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Capable of serious mileage even on modern roads, BSA's excellent 500 twin is a seriously well-developed classic riding machine

1: A drip tray directs petrol away from the magneto; particularly handy when tickling the carb before starting

2: Fully enclosed chaincase cost an extra £3 in 1958 and is worth every penny. Remember that it is not an oil bath…

3: Although this is the sporting version of BSA's 500 twin, it's not easy to tell by looking at it. Big, sensible mudguards, full chain enclosure, an air filter and a focus on weatherproofing are usually the hallmarks of a sports-tourer, had there been such a classification in 1958

4: The last of the line used a simple housing to tidy up the headlamp area, although the ammeter is hard to read from the saddle. Hidden away behind the steering damper knob is a steering lock, although it's not particularly secure

DEVELOPED DURING THE late 1930s, BSA's first parallel twin was launched in 1946. Triumph's 500 Speed Twin may have been faster but the A7 quickly gained a reputation for being quieter, dependable and significantly more oiltight. Proving popular, the A7 was given one significant revamp and then continuously tweaked and improved throughout a 16-year production run.

The early A7 twins featured a cast iron cylinder head and block with a bore and stroke of 62mm by 82mm to give 495cc, reaching 27bhp at 5800rpm. At a time when most manufacturers were using twin camshafts, BSA cut costs with a gear-driven single camshaft operating overhead valves via four pushrods. Two separate aluminium alloy rocker boxes were fitted with Edward Turner-influenced screw caps. A neat 'semi-unit' gearbox was bolted to the rear of the crankcase with primary chain tensioning achieved by means of a curved slipper tensioner. This was adjusted by a screw-in bolt with a lock nut. Both wheels were quickly detachable. The early, longer stroke single carb A7 engine lasted four years, with a sports variant, the higher compression twin carb A7 Special (soon renamed the Star Twin with plunger frame) enjoying a power increase to 31bhp at 6000rpm.

BSA introduced an all-new A10 650 twin late in 1950, designed by industry stalwart Bert Hopwood. A new version of the A7 followed shortly after and featured a redesigned engine based solidly on the A10. Outwardly the engine was similar to the earlier A7 but improvements had been made within. Changing the bore and stroke to 66 by 72.6mm increased the engine capacity to 497cc. There was no particular increase in outright power but the shorter stroke engine is considered smoother than both the A10 and the earlier long-stroke A7. The new A7 used the same single Type 6 Amal carb as its predecessor. The electrics were changed over to positive earth and a trough was added below the camshaft to retain oil, providing vital lubrication to the cams even if the engine was laid up for long periods. A one-piece rocker box was introduced, making reassembly fiddly and difficult. BSA provided a special 'comb' tool which is helpful when attempting to keep the pushrods in place in the

rocker ends when refitting the rocker box but it is still very awkward.

The new engine was to prove remarkably reliable, with a robust bottom end. Initially available using the same rigid frame and sprung saddle as the earlier A7, the cycle parts remained largely unchanged at the start. In 1951 BSA's own plunger frame was fitted as standard, prior to the launch of the swinging arm framed A7 Sports model in 1954 featuring a light aluminium alloy cylinder head.

In 1953 a broad headlamp cowling was introduced housing the seven-inch pre-focus headlamp. The speedo took centre stage flanked by the light switch and ammeter at a jaunty angle which made it awkward to read. Attached to the top of the forks, the cowling was colour matched to the pale polychromatic green fuel tank with its chrome panelling. A contrasting darker green frame made a nice change from black.

The petrol tank was redesigned with a single fixing bolt and was also rubber mounted to help eliminate rattles and to prolong the life of the welds. The oil tank also increased in size and changed shape to fit its new, higher location, with a matching triangular toolbox on the left side of the frame.

The Sports model soon became the Shooting Star with a single, large bore Amal Monobloc carb, high lift cams, high compression pistons and a sports camshaft running a compression ratio of 7.25:1. Ignition control was manual, using a small lever on the left handlebar to retard the ignition for starting. The forks were altered, increasing their oil capacity and damping. The swinging arm and three position Girling shocks added a mere inch in length but a significant 31lb in weight to the frame. The new frame required the gearbox and engine to be separated, so the primary chain is tensioned by repositioning the gearbox. This consequently moves the front sprocket so the drive chain needs adjustment afterwards.

PRICE GUIDE

£3500 to £6000

FAULTS & FOIBLES

Routine maintenance and regular oil changes are essential. Fitting an external oil filter can help. Timing side main bearing wear reduces oil flow to the big ends and can be costly to fix; SRM offer an effective conversion but this isn't always necessary on classics ridden gently. Modern fork kits give two-way damping with multi-rate springs to tighten handling and roadholding

ALSO CONSIDER

BSA A10; physically similar, more mid-range and top end but prices 15% higher. AJS Model 20 or Matchless G9; similarly solid 500 twins. BSA A50; a worthy successor with unit construction engine/gearbox, and a fair bit cheaper

SPECIALISTS

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5: The BSA front fork works well, and even has a rear stay which can double up as a front stand, making wheel removal very easy. The brake is adequate, no more than that

BUY IT NOW

This 1958 AA 'rides very well' says Chris at Venture Classics. There's a dent in the petrol tank but 'mechanically the bike is very nice indeed with a quiet and very sweet engine with good clutch gearbox and brakes.' It's an 'older restoration but still very smart and presentable.' £6250 at ventureclassics.com

Motor Cycling's 2000 mile road test in 1956 gave a glowing report of the A7 Shooting Star: 'A versatile Sports machine with good road-holding, flexibility and running economy'. They were particularly impressed by its sparkling performance, fuel economy, handling at any speed or over any surface and the absence of oil leaks except at the oil filler cap when the machine was ridden hard.

Optional extras at this time included an air filter, fully enclosed chaincase, leg shields, front and rear crash bars and sidestand. Forking out an extra pound for a sidestand was a necessity for many owners following complaints about the centrestand which required a fair bit of effort to deploy successfully. Recognising that owners might wish to remodel their bikes, BSA offered a rather neat reverse selector camplate so that rearsets could be fitted and the gear pedal reversed while retaining the standard change pattern.

Above: This machine is very close to stock, and in fine ridden condition; recently returned from an Italian excursion, too

A revised headlamp cowling with chrome trim was introduced in 1958. Narrower than the previous version, it again housed the light switch and the still awkward to read ammeter. BSA obviously paid attention to their customers in some areas as the centrestand was modified making it easier to use. The engine's compression ratio increased to 8:1, reflecting the improvement in petrol quality over that decade – and an urgent need to keep up with Norton and Triumph 500 twins. To effectively slow the mass of the 430lb A10, BSA fitted a larger eight-inch diameter front brake to both machines, the Shooting Star being marginally lighter. Braking can be improved by replacing the sls brake with a 2ls from a later BSA.

MANUFACTURED: 1955 to 1962 (Shooting Star) **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv parallel twin **BORE / STROKE:** 66 x 72.6mm **CAPACITY:** 497cc **COMPRESSION:** 8:1 **POWER:** 32bhp @ 6250rpm **CARBURETTOR:** Amal Monobloc **IGNITION:** Lucas magneto **ELECTRICS:** 6V, 60W dynamo **LUBRICATION:** Dry sump, gear pump **CLUTCH:** Multi-plate **GEARBOX:** Four-speed positive-stop foot-operated **FRAME:** Welded duplex cradle **PRIMARY DRIVE:** chain **FINAL DRIVE:** chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 8" sls drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7" sls drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic forks with hydraulic damping **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm with twin adjustable Girling shocks **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 3.50 x 19 **WHEELBASE:** 56" **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6" **SEAT HEIGHT:** 30" **WEIGHT:** 416lb dry **BRAKING:** 29ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 98mph **PRICE NEW:** £265 14s 5d in 1958

Often regarded as a popular entry point into British bike ownership, BSA's enduring A7 is a sensible choice with plenty of variants to choose from. Later models such as the Shooting Star are a good option with a robust engine making maintenance routine and relatively straightforward, with the added bonus that spares, advice and expert knowledge are readily available from specialists, the happy people at the BSA Owners' Club and online forums.

The bike you see here is a 1958 Shooting Star which has been with its owner for a while. He confirms that regular servicing, including oil changes every 1500 miles, and routine maintenance are key to its sustained reliability. In good oiltight shape, this machine is regularly used and is definitely no stranger to long distance runs, having recently returned from a jaunt to Italy without missing a beat.

With easy starting, good acceleration, performance, road holding and fuel economy, the A7 is a good all-rounder. It's not a road rocket, but if you're looking for a reliable middleweight classic you could do a lot worse. Any A7 is capable of a reasonable speed and offers decent acceleration and handling, with no surprises for sustained 'B for bendy road' fun. CBG

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Brat Kwak

A remarkably unconventional version of Kawasaki's conventional twin

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME **PHOTOS BY** ROB GRIST PHOTOGRAPHY AND OLIVER HULME

Below: Stripped pretty bare. There comes a point at which absolutely everything inessential has been removed

1: Engine fanciers will find much to provide delight in the neat, compact, bevel-driver twin. Also decent performance, of course

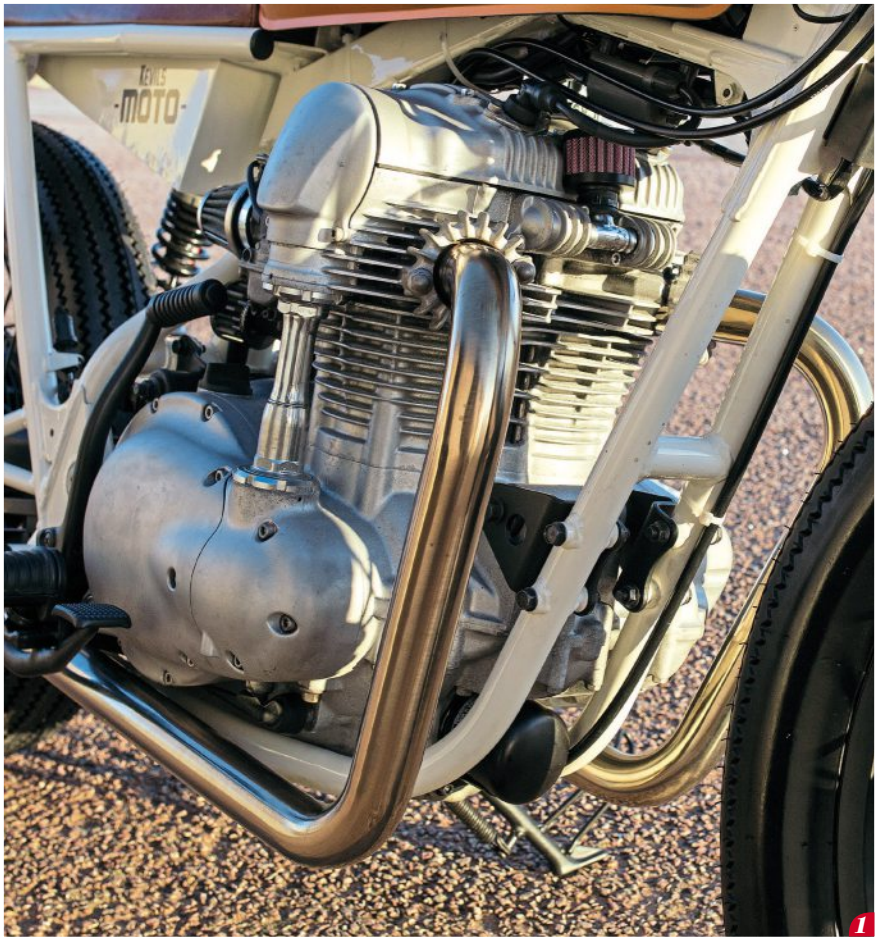
2: Motogadget's speedo is a pricey but clever piece of kit, and can offer the dedicated rider all manner of allegedly interesting details

3: Unlike the engine, the W650 frame is hardly an elegant device, although to be fair most of the odd metalwork was intended to be hidden. The white box beneath the seat contains the electrics and the battery

WHEN KAWASAKI LAUNCHED the W650 in 1999 they beat Triumph to the retro punch by two years. While the W650 didn't set the world on fire, it can stake the claim to being the first retro design built as a complete unit, rather than grabbing an existing engine off the shelf at Kawasaki and building a frame round it. If anything, Kawasaki has as much claim to be re-creating its own past as Triumph does. The first big four-stroke with Kawasaki on the tank was the W1, launched in 1966. This was a 650cc bike based heavily on the postwar, pre-unit construction, 500cc vertical-twin BSA A7 design inherited from Meguro when Kawasaki took over that company. Kawasaki had paid for the licence allowing Meguro to produce an A7 copy in 1960.

The 1999 W650 looked as much like a 1960s classic as Kawasaki could make it and was different to every other bike they had on sale. From a company that makes insanely fast sports bikes came a 676cc air-cooled parallel 360-degree twin, with a balance shaft and a bevel driven camshaft in a soft state of tune. The W650 has a spec sheet that would not look out of place on a 1970s Triumph – traditional forks, spoked wheels, drum brake at the back, a pair of shock absorbers and a conventional steel tube frame. It does have modern touches like electronic ignition and a wet sump, but the look of the beast, with British style silencers, chrome headlight and bulging side panels, is from another time. And while the W650 wasn't that big a seller straight off the showroom floor, Kawasaki's homage to their past remains a popular beast second-hand. They retain their value well for something that is basically a big, if cool looking, commuter bike.

One thing the Kawasaki has that marks it as out of the ordinary in the 21st century is holes in its profile. With bikes today looking slab-sided, the W650 has the holes you find on old classics. You can see through holes behind engines, holes between frame tubes and cylinder blocks, holes between rear seats and rear tyres. Motorcycles used to have big holes you could see through, but this is something the big manufacturers have had to let go because of regulations that require all kinds of electronica and anti-pollution doodads to be fitted and hidden away behind panels and inside exhaust systems. Just as British bikers started taking bits off their British bikes in the 1960s that were deemed unnecessary, so the Japanese Bratstyle craze of the past few years has seen many W650s get the same treatment in the far east. This is a style that has caught on around the world.



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This W650 was built in Paignton, Devon by Kev Hill at Kevil's Speed Shop. Kev has built a reputation customising more than 100 BMW airhead customs, but as untouched BMWs became more expensive and many more builders had them in their sights Kev went in a different direction and decided to build more affordable Japanese bikes based on tried and tested popular models. British and US bikes were out – partly because the donor bikes are too expensive, and partly because Kev doesn't own any AF or Imperial spanners.

This 2005 W650 was a part-exchange bargain that ended up in a main dealer and came from a lady owner who covered 10,000 miles on it. It was a little worse for wear, having lived the best part of a decade outside in the Devon climate. The bike was first started up and tried out to ensure it was sound before being stripped to its basic components and all worn out parts replaced with new. Kev decided that the bike should ape a Southern Californian 1970s style and the first move was to modify the rear subframe, which was redesigned and refabricated for a more minimalist look.

Although the frame looks relatively conventional on the stock W650, under the bodywork the tubes twist and turn behind the engine and under the seat. Rather than trying to hide this metal spaghetti Kev went in the opposite direction, painting the frame cream to make a feature of it. The side panels were done away with and a tiny integral under-seat box was created to contain a compact Lithium-ion battery and the wiring.

PRICE GUIDE

£3000-4500, depending on condition (for a stock W650)

FAULTS AND FOIBLES

Most W650s get a relatively easy life and few problems are reported. Engine is in such a low state of tune it should last well. If a bike is neglected, the impact on the lashings of chrome will tell the tale. The centrestand decks out with enthusiastic cornering

ALSO CONSIDER

Triumph T100 Bonneville (much more powerful and a lot heavier. Faster and more stable on the road), Moto Guzzi V7 (more powerful, exclusive and with a shaft drive; better over a distance), Yamaha XS650 (Getting a little long in the tooth, a late XS import with low miles has the advantage of being considered a genuine classic)

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The most striking element of the W650 is the replacement of the petrol tank. The big, bulbous, four gallon stock item was swapped for a slender tank from a Kawasaki KH100. Kev has a shelf of old tanks and will go through the lot during a build until he finds the right look. The idea for the paint job came about when the original design of satin black with cream stripes to match the frame came back from the paint shop and Kev decided it looked dull. So he covered the satin black with period Volkswagen orange paint and used an abrasive pad to give it an aged patina. Then he covered that with a matt lacquer. While that paint job looks at first glance to be worn out, it's really a top-notch finish, with the orange paint and the cream frame giving the W650 a look akin to an early 70s oil-in-frame BSA Firebird.

Below: Everything you need, and very little else. A brat indeed

Right: LED tail-light and tiny LED indicators are a smart and tidy addition, maintaining at least a little legality

Stainless exhaust pipes from Motad feed into basic shotgun mufflers, though the amount of muffling they do is open to question. Mudguards front and rear have been ditched in the hunt for that pared-down look, as has the chainguard, which Kev reasoned wasn't needed as the W650 isn't fitted with pillion pegs. The seat was custom built locally using a laser-cut sheet steel base and leather sourced by Kev. He has hides of various shades and different kinds hanging up, and uses them in the same way he uses his petrol tank stock, matching them up to the bike until he finds one that works.

As there's less than 10,000 miles on the under-stressed engine, Kev soda blasted the outside and left the rest alone, while the standard carbs had small cone air filters attached. The tyres are the flavour-of-the-month Firestone replicas no self-respecting Bratstyle bike can be seen without, and these wrap around stove enamelled wire wheels. Rather than replacing all the old nuts and bolts with new, Kev used a Frost metal blacking kit to give the bike a vintage look and saved a considerable amount of cash in the process.

Minimalism was also embraced in the fitting of the speedometer. This tiny Motogadget device looks like a very basic custom item but costs around £300. This is because not only does it measure speed, but a button on the bracket allows you to check charging voltage, trip distance and the time. The unit also contains all the idiot lights you need despite having the footprint of a small biscuit. There are YSS shock absorbers at the rear, four tiny LED indicators, LED lighting on the back and a Bates type headlamp. With all the bodywork removed and the heavy stock parts disposed of, this 650 is as light as a 250 twin.

Now the W650 is finished Kev aims to build around 20 different bikes a year. With BMWs on the backburner, upcoming projects include a Honda CG125, a Honda 600 trail bike and a Suzuki GN400, as well as a pair of US import Honda CL350 street scramblers which look set to be gracing Britain's very own west coast with a new look. CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1999- 2006 **ENGINE:** 675cc 8v parallel twin **TRANSMISSION:** 6-speed; multiplate wet clutch **FRAME:** Steel tube/double cradle **SUSPENSION:** F: Telescopic fork, R: Twin shocks with adjustable preload **BRAKES:** F: 300mm disc, R: 200mm drum **LENGTH:** 85.8 in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31.1 in **WEIGHT:** 429lb **FUEL CAPACITY:** 4 gallon

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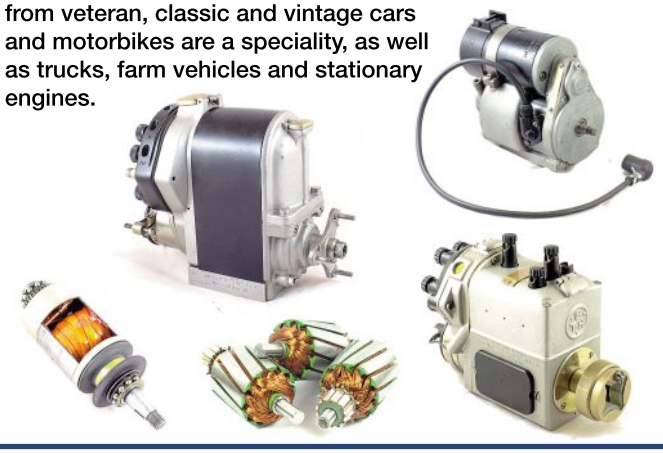

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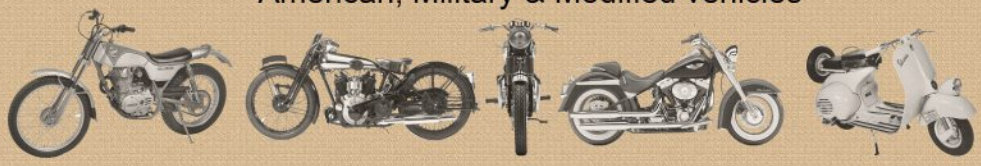

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WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Many of the distinctive Velocette features are on show here. Like the unusual high-cam engine, the clever adjustable rear suspension and the world-famous fishtail silencer

1: Veloce was famous for building sophisticated motorcycles. Adjusting the Viper's shock absorbers couldn't be more simple. The rear frame is clearly developed from an earlier rigid design

2: Veloce had its own take on the headlight, too, with longer than usual fork 'ears' slowing a neat 'dash' panel to fit over the headlamp itself

3: Deeply recessed wheel nuts allow the quickly detachable rear wheel to be easily removed, leaving the brake drum, brake plate and chain in place. And what would a Velocette be without its fishtail silencer?

4: Sidecar lugs are standard, even on the sporting Velos. But fitting a chair to a bike as brisk as this one seems a little counter-intuitive

5: The Viper benefits from two sturdy and easy to use stands

THE VELOCETTE VIPER and Venom sports singles were introduced in 1955. Charles Udall designed both bikes to share the ohv singles' exceptionally sturdy bottom end. The 499cc Venom used a 86mm bore and stroke, while a smaller 72mm bore gave the Viper 349cc. Renowned for being largely vibration-free, the Viper was seriously speedy for a 1950s 350 pushrod single. It offered smooth, swift acceleration which was aided by a close ratio gearbox, and a top speed of over 90mph was easily reached.

Velocettes were run and tested by managers and staff so any issues were quickly identified and sorted out, which obviously benefitted the buying public. In 1961 a Velocette Venom set the record for the first motorcycle to average over 100mph for 24 hours. A team of riders including Bertie Goodman, Veloce sales director, and *Motor Cycling*'s journalist Bruce Main-Smith averaged 100.05mph for over 24 hours at the notoriously bumpy Circuit De Vitesse, Montlhéry, France. No mean feat when you consider the Venom had no headlamp and the unlit track was illuminated by a series of car headlamps connected to batteries which created a hypnotic strobe effect on the riders! A similar attempt on a Viper in 1963 was sadly thwarted due to the failure of a specially made sandcast piston. Leaving that aside, the Viper definitely has its own charms. As with many smaller capacity machines, it can be easier to live with than its bigger sibling.

The early Vipers had an Alfin alloy barrel with a bonded cast iron liner (this was replaced by a cast iron barrel in later years), a split skirt piston giving a higher compression ratio and a light alloy cylinder head with hairpin valve springs. In typical Velocette fashion the timing gears are really efficient. Fine pitch gearwheels drive the high camshaft and magneto while the dynamo is belt driven from the end of the crankshaft.

Rather than locating the clutch in the primary chaincase with the final drive sprocket separating it from the gearbox, the Viper's clutch is located between the gearbox and the gearbox final drive sprocket. With just three nuts to undo, this made it easy for road testers at the time, who could quickly swap between sprockets while testing top speed and acceleration.

Velocette stuck to their tried and tested brazed

and welded frame with a rather sharp angle where the downtube meets the bottom cradle. The rear suspension is mounted on two individual swinging arms rather than the more conventional U-shaped set-up. The shock absorbers are designed for easy adjustment. By simply slackening the top bolt the shockers can be pulled up to stiffen up the suspension.

The Velocette singles' idiosyncratic starting procedure is legendary, but with practise, once mastered it soon becomes second nature (according to those people who have actually mastered it). Similarly the (in)famous Velocette clutch is a law unto itself. The mechanism works on the principal of tilting to separate the plates. When the clutch lever is pulled in the pressure plate tilts. The driven plates don't separate entirely so can overheat and buckle if you make a habit of sitting with the clutch lever pulled at traffic lights.

In 1956 the Viper Sports model cost £247-7s-7d which included a rather hefty purchase tax of over £47. Initially available in green or black, with chrome, the Viper came with a steering damper fitted as standard and the choice of a single or dual seat. Optional extras included an air cleaner, rev counter, alloy rims, sodium cooled exhaust valve, a pannier set and chrome plated safety bar.

Velocette anticipated streamlining as the way to go in the early 1960s, and developed their Dolphin fairings and models like the Vogue with fibreglass panelling and legshields.

This particular Viper doesn't, however, sport Velocette's rather unusual glassfibre engine enclosures. Designed to be aerodynamic and to reduce mechanical noise, these covered the crankcase and gearbox. They might have protected them from the elements and stopped some of the road muck hitting the bottom of the engine, but the panels left the top of the engine poking through, which looked decidedly odd. If you didn't fancy the enclosure then the crankcase and gearbox could be supplied with a polished finish instead. Opinion was divided and a lot of owners removed the enclosures later.

Motor Cycling's 1961 road test praised the "exceptional flexibility and lightness of the engine",

PRICE GUIDE
£4000 to £8500

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Clutch adjustment and starting rituals require patience and application. Check for any stripped threads in crankcase. Vibes should not be a problem (it's normally a very smooth motor) so bracket / stay fractures suggest misaligned flywheels. Timing gears should likewise run quietly

ALSO CONSIDER
Velo Venom for more mid-range torque and higher top speed. BSA's 348cc Gold Star offers comparable performance at higher prices. Velo MAC is the roadster / touring equivalent, more common than a Viper, similar cost

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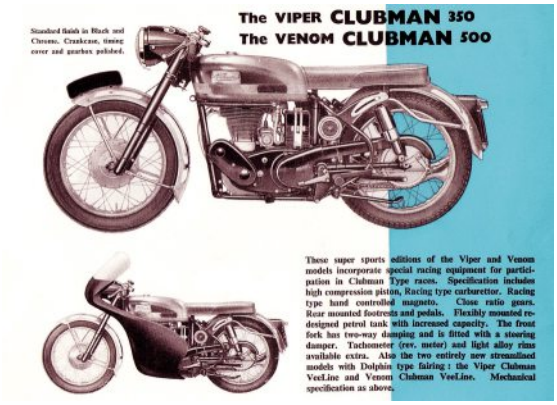
Above: One of the most charismatic and instantly recognisable of all the old British singles. Great bikes to ride, too, which is the best thing about them

but surprisingly suggested that some stylists might wish for a more shapely alternative to the distinctive silencer. These days the fishtail silencer is one of the iconic styling cues associated with the marque. If that idea had played out think what the Velocette Owners' Club magazine might have been called!

By 1963 four road versions of the Viper were available plus an off-road Scrambler. The Viper Veeline had the streamlined Dolphin fairing, giving greater protection from the elements, less windblast and the promise of higher speeds or, as the sales brochure proclaimed: "much improved penetration"! The Viper Sports and Veeline both came in a choice of black with chrome, an extremely striking red and black, or white with black enamel. Optional extras included a racing magneto with hand control, a TT type carburettor, reinforced drive side rear engine plate and chrome plated wheel rims.



MANUFACTURED: 1955 - 1968 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled ohv vertical single **BORE / STROKE:** 72 x 86mm **CAPACITY:** 349cc **COMPRESSION:** 8.5:1 **POWER:** 27bhp @ 7000rpm **CARBURETTOR:** Amal Monobloc **IGNITION:** Magneto **LIGHTING:** 6V generator Miller dynamo and regulator (1956) **LUBRICATION:** dry sump **CLUTCH:** multi plate **GEARBOX:** four speed positive-stop foot change PRIMARY DRIVE: chain FINAL DRIVE: chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 7½in drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7in drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Veloce telescopic hydraulic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, twin shock **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **WHEELBASE:** 53¾in **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 5½in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 30½in **WEIGHT:** 380lb **BRAKING:** 28ft from 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 90mph **PRICE NEW:** £247-7s-7d

Finally, the super-sports Viper Clubman, intended for competition, offered an extra 2bhp to give 29bhp at 7000rpm, also available in Veeline form with the Dolphin fairing. Optional race extras included light alloy wheel rims, a rev counter and drive, a megaphone and TT close ratio gears. BMG offered an interesting desmodromic valve gear conversion kit to eliminate valve float at high revs claiming a possible 3½bhp gain.

Velocettes are commonly regarded as engineers' motorcycles, with mechanically quiet engines designed for long life spans. About 3700 Vipers were made between 1955 and 1968, about 2000 less than the Venom. However, as the Viper and Venom share the same almost indestructible bottom end it is possible to find Vipers taken out to 500cc with Venom top ends, and Venoms with Viper top ends. Viper engine numbers are prefixed VR, Venoms VM. Spare parts are readily available, if sometimes a bit pricey, but then the same can be said for most classic bikes these days. The Velocette Owners' Club is friendly, helpful and a good starting point if you fancy practising your starting technique. The club has a wealth of information on all models and sells spares too. CBG

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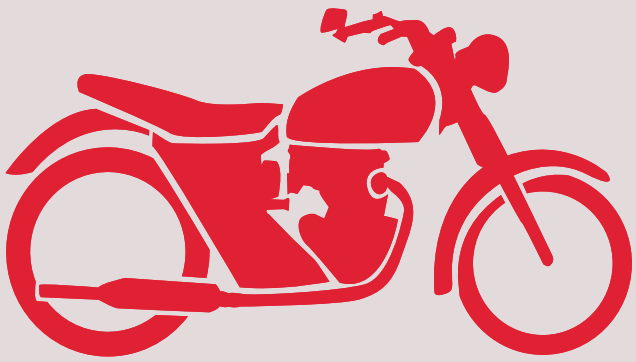

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Submersible sidevalve

Drowned but defiant: you just can't keep a good BSA down

WORDS & PHOTOS BY OLIVER HULME

Below: BSA always said their sidevalve singles were solid. This well-worn warrior spent one winter submerged in floodwater…

1: The M21 has a habit of destroying its preferred Champion spark plugs so owner Ivan always carries a couple of spares

2: The ancient coiled fuel pipe lives comfortably with a more modern filter: the best of both worlds. Gauze strainer keep small boys and large bugs out of the carb

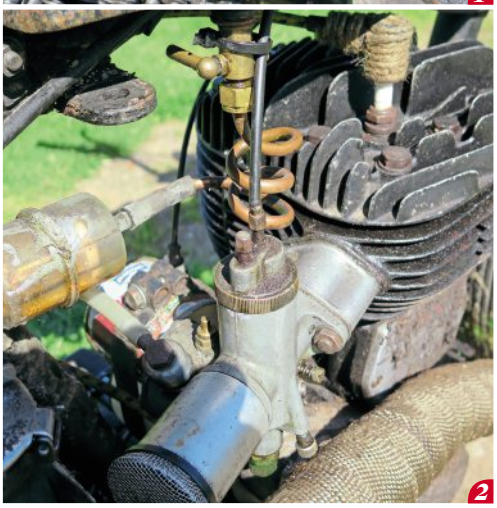
YOU'D BE FORGIVEN for thinking that this BSA M21 has spent some of its time at the bottom of a river. And you'd be right. There's something about Ivan's M21 that makes people smile. Of all the machines at Kickback at Stoneleigh, it was the tired looking BSA that got the most interest, surrounded by people at first double-taking, then open mouthed, then grinning. While a few of the chrome and polished alloy brigade grimaced, the vast majority of the visitors loved it – much to Ivan's incredulity and astonishment. You'll find people posting pictures of the sidevalve, string and sealing wax creation all over social media.

BSA's prewar military motorcycle was created by the renowned Ariel and JAP designer Val Page. It started out as a bid for a military contract from BSA in 1936 as the M20 with a 500cc sidevalve engine, which grew to 600cc to become a better sidecar hauler in 1938. Both bikes began with hand change, rigid frames and girder forks. That sidevalve engine is often referred to as 'Edwardian'; it's slow and fairly thirsty but it is also bulletproof. Possibly literally.

The M20/21 was a bit heavy with low ground clearance, which made it less suitable for military use than the Matchless G3, but BSA still built 125,000 of them for the Army. Postwar it came into its own as day-to-day transport for the masses. BSA painted them silver and started selling them to the public in 1945, initially using up old WD stocks. In those 'export or die' days, in a country with few new cars available and with ex-servicemen familiar with the breed, the M20/21s were popular among people who didn't want to be limited to train, bus, tram or bicycle. Both were given mounting lugs to fit a family sidecar.

The M20's sturdy frame and girder forks and a heavy-duty gearbox made it ideal for its utility role. The M21 had the same engine but with a longer stroke. Taking it out to 600cc meant that it had more grunt than the M20, although sidecar gearing and a heavier flywheel kept top speed down to around 50mph. But it would go on forever and was so simple that roadside repairs were easy to perform. The M21 got the telescopic forks fitted to BSA A and B series bikes in 1947, an optional plunger frame in 1951 as well as an alloy cylinder head. While the M20 was dropped in 1955 the M21 soldiered on with bigger brakes, an Amal Monobloc carb and both plunger and rigid frame options.

By 1958 the M21 was only available as a special order, with the AA taking most of them. When Bedford HA and Mini vans replaced sidecars the outfits were retired by the AA, and as the contract ended so the last plunger-framed sidevalve BSA left



3: Unique exhaust cobbled together from components borrowed from a roadside compressor and a vacuum cleaner. If the exhaust wrap fails to outrage the delicate, then check out the sisal string on the plug cap

4: A primary chaincase? What would you need one of those for? In any case, it allows the onlooker to admire BSA's robust clutch and engine shaft shock absorber. Observe also the front lower sidecar lug

the production line in 1963. But the M21 was as tough as can be and it took more than a cancelled contract to kill them off. You can still see them all over the world, wherever the British Empire held sway.

Ivan has owned his M21 for 17 years. A 1956 model, the registration number was sold by a previous owner and the DVLA gave it a 1961 plate – Ivan has little hope of getting an age-related plate for the bike. The BSA was originally fairly stock when he got it, but in 2007 the M21 was in his shed when the nearby River Severn burst its banks. The garden flooded with water nearly nine feet deep. When the water receded the work started.

The bike, despite having been underwater, was mechanically sound and being such a simple machine it had survived the deluge intact. The magneto was at first replaced with one from a Lister-Petter stationary engine that would only operate on full advance, before a Lucas item, much maligned by Ivan, was fitted. He used an old paint can as a cover. But before you decide that the thing has been thrown together from scrap, understand that Ivan replaced the old unreliable Lucas capacitor with a 21st century solid state item.

The M21 will only run on Champion spark plugs – in one of those the perverse ways of behaving that some old motorcycles delight in. There are two spares, a needle file and an adjustable spanner taped permanently to the frame tube 'just in case'. That high-level exhaust came in two parts; a titanium-wrapped downpipe from a roadside compressor and a length of pipe from an industrial vacuum cleaner, chosen because it already had the right slash cut. The petrol tank is an ancient home-made item picked up from a friend, with a Pratts oil can filler cap.

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Engine oil, magneto/dynamo and exhaust valves all benefit from regular attention. Make sure the valve lifter disengages properly to ensure easy starting

ALSO CONSIDER

BSA's ohv B33 500 single is faster, you can find them more easily and cheaply than an M21. Panther M100/120 ohv big singles are also sidecar haulers which started life in the 1930s. Norton 16H is a similar sidevalve with a military heritage

SPECIALISTS

Military machine info: wdbsa.nl
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Classic Motorcycles Ltd have this 1949 M21 for sale. Possibly a re-registered ex-Army machine, it's been in a collection for years. Ready for the road; tax and MoT exempt. £5750 from 01928 788500

Above: Hands up all those who remember when bikes like this were used as field gates. Priceless classics today, of course. Times change

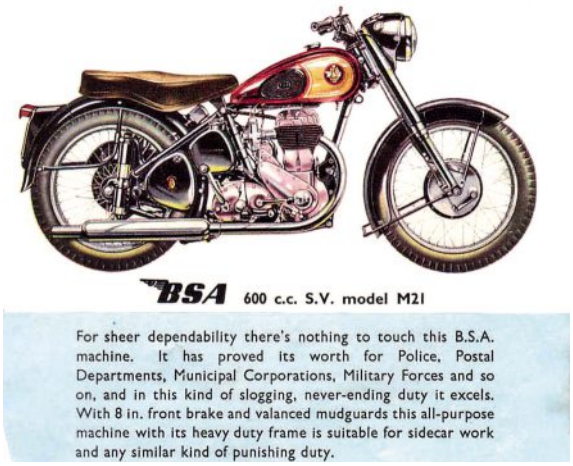
Right: A paint can substitutes for a more conventional dynamo here, using the original clamp to hold that can covering the old redundant dynamo drive. You don't have light; you don't need a dynamo

After the flood the engine had white furry fungal growth on it which was wiped off; the solidity of the engineering underneath all that chunky aluminium is almost miraculous. While doing some running repairs on the M21, Ivan discovered that despite the oil pump worm gear having detached itself the engine had kept running without complaint, with the detergent-free 50W oil doing its job. The primary chaincase is missing, yet although Ivan does occasionally look down a little nervously at the exposed spinning clutch, his feet protected only by a few strip metal guards, he says he's never had to adjust the primary chain.

For years the engine was completely oiltight – until he decided to clean the oil tank gauze filter and now it does leak a little, necessitating the carrying of an old baked bean can to catch the drips. Parts of the bike are covered in sisal string because Ivan likes the look of it, and the seat is the pillion pad from a Kawasaki Eliminator. There's a battery-powered bicycle horn clamped to the front forks.

It's got stock M21 brakes and big fat sidecar hauling wheels and tyres. Despite its puny 15bhp output, Ivan says the M21 doesn't hang about on the narrow country lanes around his home – he has a tendency to ride everywhere at full throttle. "You can't run fast on the local roads, and I don't ride it gently. I've seen off a Commando down the lanes. You do have to hang on like grim death, and the forks flex a bit. But you can scrape the pegs and it's great fun to ride." The plunger rear end "might as well be a rigid," he said. Gearbox ratios on the M21 are fine in the first three gears, but top is very tall, giving the M21 its 'fire every lamppost' reputation.

Ivan's bike has hordes of fans but does occasionally raise the ire of restorers. There is light on the horizon for anyone who is appalled that a classic BSA could be treated in this way – Ivan has all the original parts for the M21. He says he won't refit them himself, preferring to keep the bike as it is. And how did Ivan come across the M21 in the first place? He swapped it, in one of those deals that make you blink, for a 145bhp Yamaha V-Max. CBG



MANUFACTURED: 1937-1963 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled sv single **BORE / STROKE:** 81 x 112mm **CAPACITY:** 591cc **COMPRESSION:** 5:1 **POWER:** 15bhp @ 4200rpm **LUBRICATION:** Dry sump **IGNITION:** Magneto/Dynamo **CARBURETTOR:** Single Amal Monobloc **TRANSMISSION:** Chain **GEARBOX:** Four-speed right foot change **FRAME:** single downtube cradle **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Plunger shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** 8 inch drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7 inch drum **TYRES:** 3.25 x 18 front 3.50 x 18 rear **DRY WEIGHT:** 369lb **LENGTH:** 86 inches **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 4.6 inches **SADDLE HEIGHT:** 29 inches **TOP SPEED:** 50mph

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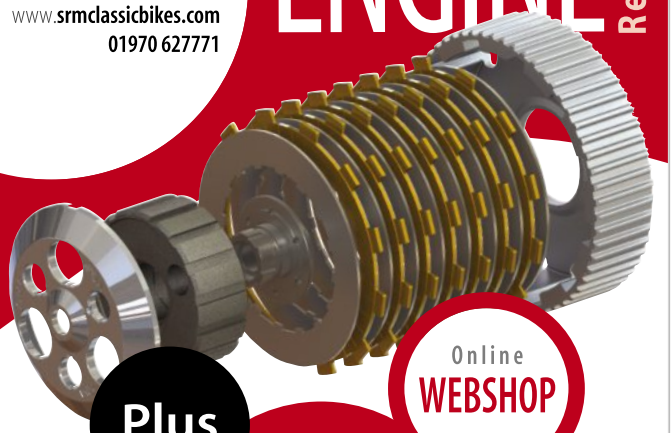

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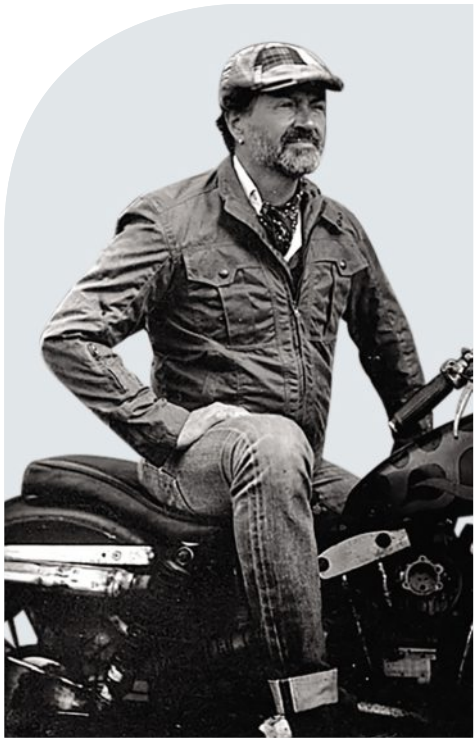

PAUL D'ORLÉANS

Pleasures in the rough

Taking to the banking, the Montlhéry way

I WAIT TWO years for it, which is probably best, as it would be a shame for such a lovely event to be taken for granted. Vintage Revival Montlhéry is perhaps the most esoteric vintage motorsports event, sitting outside our current cultural norms for vintage vehicles. Today, we appreciate an old racing car or bike either on the lawn at shows and concours, or inside a museum, or well behind the safety fence at vintage races. At events like Goodwood, with 50,000 people milling around, we grift for passes granting access behind the velvet rope, so we can see these gorgeous beasts up close and personal.

To attend an event with no barriers, and almost no facilities to speak of, is unusual today, which is perhaps why they attract a passionate following. I reckon the Bonneville Speed Week and Pendine Sands races are similar to VRM, with little catering to spectator comfort, and very little public participation. 'Primitive' doesn't work for everyone, but for those truly nutso for old racing vehicles, shedding the VIP champagne tent creates the best possible atmosphere.

This year, at the 3rd iteration of Vintage Revival, I once again relied on a borrowed motorcycle (from the kind gents at The Automobile mag), a 1920 ABC, truly a revolutionary vehicle, which means it didn't sell that well. Or rather, it was discovered (after 2000 were built) that every machine sold lost about the same amount of money as it took in – someone in accounting was instructed to turn their back, and keep the lads at Sopwith (who built ABCs after the First World War) working while they sorted out other, more profitable projects.

The little 400cc ABC flat twin used overhead valves in the era of F-heads and sidevalves, with a four-speed gearbox and full suspension front and rear, and an all-welded double-loop frame to boot. The cylinder fins are machined from solid steel to a fine, aircraft-quality pitch, and of course the ride is dead smooth and cushy with self-damping leaf springs absorbing the bumps. No wonder they couldn't make any money on the thing, it's a little wingless airplane, another piece of magic dreamed up by the notoriously odd Granville Bradshaw.

Riding on the Montlhéry track is what it must have been like at Brooklands by the late 1930s, and perhaps worse. With big concrete paving squares separated by expansion joints, the banking is pretty rough, and deteriorating in spots, so high speed hijinks is a fairly bumpy experience. With a near-vertical top 'lane', it takes about 100mph to hold the high line, and is an unnerving experience. The banking at Daytona is about half as steep, and not curved but at a flat angle, probably for the better – skidding out while vertical is best left explored by wall of death riders. Luckily, the only injury on a very wet VRM this year was caused by the auxiliary air pump on an ABC Skootamota jamming its rear wheel at 15mph, which still landed its unlucky owner in a brain scan gurney, as pudding basin helmets are best left for custards, not brains.

With a little help from sponsors, I was there to produce a short film on both the Montlhéry race track and the VRM event, to create a visual poem on the tremendous character of the place. My crew from Berlin – True Motion Pictures – shot a lovely piece about a 1928 Neander last year, on which I wound the throttle right back through the woods of Bavaria, to tremendous sonic effect, which they captured perfectly, the JAP V-twin sounding like an animal roaring in the wilderness. Film production is a new avenue for me, but it seems that's where the eyeballs are going on the Web. My 10-year-old blogspot/website is badly overgrown, and currently undergoing a major facelift for video; by the time you read this it will be a living thing – theVintagent.com.

I love the written word, and reinforcing old bike culture by telling its story, and I also love moving pictures, having started the Motorcycle Film Festival five years ago. While having a festival was a grand party, it was limited to those who could attend, so all those motorcycle movies will soon live on my site, where they can be seen. As we're in the midst of a still-expanding global renaissance of motorcycle culture, it's my mission to keep vintage motorcycling in the picture, and remind everyone where all those groovy customs originated!

There were no(?) other Americans at Montlhéry this year, although quite a few Brits participated, like the Brooklands Museum gang, and the staff and friends of The Automobile, among others. I can't be rare in thinking a crumbling, oxidised, terribly inconvenient Grande Dame overflowing with the ghosts of motoring history is worth the trek? Or is champagne and VIP access the necessary honey to attract enthusiasts? Give me oil, give me smoke, give me an intriguing old machine and a racket heard nowhere else, and I'll be happy. CBG

'Give me oil, give me smoke, give me an intriguing old machine and a racket heard nowhere else, and I'll be happy…'

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**

What makes a classic?

The boundaries are increasingly blurred, but Williams thinks he knows the answers

LAST MONTH I bemoaned the dearth of simple and, ergo, reliable British machinery that could be acquired without losing the shirt off one's back and actually ridden this summer… rather than rebuilt in time for the next one. And nothing much has changed since I got that off my chest. Except that rather than carry on the frustrating and frankly rather depressing quest to find the motorcycling equivalent of a unicorn or a dodo that wasn't a BSA Dandy or a Norman Nippy, I've gone and bought a Beemer. But not in fact an airhead twin that would've of course met both the minimalist and dependability criteria, but a liquid-cooled triple, in other words a K75S.

Now there are those who would sneer that a 1993 machine of whatever provenance is not a classic, but happily my insurance company is not one of them. And not only did they categorise the BM as exactly that, but they also pointed out that my other three bikes, circa 1982-1985, were of, well, 'vintage' vintage. At least for insurance purposes. Which is why this latest entrant to my garage bumped up the cost of my multi-bike policy more than a little and also set me thinking about the whole business of what makes a classic.

Somewhat ironically, if I still owned the first K75S I bought new in 1987, it would've qualified as vintage… for insurance purposes at least. But after ten trouble-free and happily ridden years of ownership, I no longer did – although that indeed has much to do with why I've bought another one, albeit a later version with ABS. (As an aside, there are also those naysayers who claim that anything fitted with fuel injection, liquid cooling and ABS could never qualify as a classic… and I'm almost inclined to agree with 'em.)

But 1993 was, after all, 24 years ago so at the very least it's an 'old bike', or possibly even a 'coming classic'. And apart from insurance purposes, why does this matter?

Well, we've become so inured to the idea of bikes built in the 1950s, 60s and even the 70s being the only ones worthy of our admiration and lust, that anything later than that is somewhat suspect. And then there's the rarity issue.

It's fairly obvious that the older a vehicle is, the more likely it is that there are fewer and fewer of them left as time passes by, and such growing scarcity whilst of course being entirely relative to the number of the blighters that were built in the first place, still pushes their prices up. Especially of examples that are in the much revered 'original condition', even more so with 'matching numbers'.

But there are now a whole raft of bikes built in the 1990s that are becoming sought-after for all of the aforementioned reasons. Yamaha YZR1000Rs and TDM850s, Suzuki GR650s and LS650s, Kawasaki W650s and virtually any old Moto Guzzi or Ducati from that decade are fetching prices higher than they did two or three years ago and which must therefore be considered as collectable, if not actually 'classics'. Go back a little further and even what we used to refer to, somewhat disparagingly in fact, as bread-and-butter bikes are now becoming objects of desire for many of us who grew up riding 'em… and even by younger persons who can see there's a turn to be made buying and selling 'em.

Find yourself a Kawasaki GT550 or 750 in decent nick nowadays and you're looking to spend up to a couple of grand to put it in your shed. Other dispatch riding fodder like Honda CX and VT500s have bottomed out and are now rising to the point where you'd be hard pressed to buy a runner for under £1000. But are they classics – at least in the sense that most readers of this magazine would thus rank them?

Probably not.

But then there are other reasons for loving old bikes that have less to do with rarity or even the value we put on the ones that provided the soundtrack to our youth, and chief amongst these are their aesthetic appeal and the way they went about their business. Which is an even more subjective issue. So, to a certain sort of rider, virtually any Harley-Davidson is a classic, even one built five years ago, because they love the way they all look and they haven't changed much in, ooh, 50 years. And me, well I love the look of Honda CB650 Nighthawks and Yamaha XS650s, which is probably why they fetch prices well beyond other bikes that were built in much smaller numbers.

And whilst I'd never want to own one myself, I can just about understand why screamy little KR-1S Kawasakis and RGV 250 Suzukis fetch silly money, because back in the day as mere quarter-litre strokers they offered 125+mph performance.

So where is all this taking us? Should we now agree, along with my insurance company, that anything built over, say, 20 years ago is a classic, or should we all just become more open-minded about what works for us when it comes down to doing what we want them to do better than those that don't?

And there lies a classic conundrum. CBG

'Should we now agree, along with my insurance company, that anything built over, say, 20 years ago is a classic?'

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

Bike envy

Something special for a weekend

RIDING DOWN ON a classic bike, part of a small group making steady progress towards the southerly delights of Brighton, the sun twinkling off the chrome and listening to the exhaust orchestra all around is a fine way to spend a Sunday morning. It was the Brighton Burn-up and I was astride something period and vaguely in the spirit of the moment. But I wasn't riding a Triton, my friend Nick was. Is there any bike that captures the spirit of the café racer scene better than that heavenly amalgam of Triumph twin engine and Norton rolling chassis?

Easier to live with and cheaper to buy than a Goldie, the bitsa approach of Tritons and TriBSAs encouraged a relaxed attitude to parts and finish and something I find myself increasingly relating to as the current classic scene edges ever closer to only accepting factory correct machines. But, with a Triton, anything goes, yet it's still recognisably a Triton, if only by the 6in lettering on the tank.

After 20 miles or so of admiring Nick's fine machine I resolved to have one myself. Yet, just a year previously, I did. The very one I'm now coveting in full defiance of the Ten Commandments. I bought it on a whim of opportunity and mentioned to my best friend that it was really the sort of bike he should own. He agreed and I sold it, foolishly. It's a 500cc pre-unit with close ratio gearbox and disc front end. The Triton looks and sounds great. Nick even manages to look cool when riding it; something I never achieve.

At this point I could tell you the story about admiring my reflection in Rumbelows' window as I sauntered past on my RD250, thinking I looked like Kenny Roberts, before crashing into the back of a neighbour's Ford Anglia; But I'd be too embarrassed to share.

We arrived at Brighton, the much-admired Triton basking in its natural environment while my old nail was wedged in among the other also-rans. Naturally, I spent the rest of the day looking at other Tritons and plotting my next purchase. By the following week I'd amassed enough information to have some idea of what constitutes a good 'un from a bad 'un. All that remained to do was actually purchase one.

Have you ever tried to buy a Triton? Normally, there are several advertised for sale and the usual procedure when buying a bike is to contact the vendor – who is delighted to hear from you. You then arrange to see the bike, agree a price then take it home with you. Simple. With a Triton, though, special conditions apply.

The first one I called about was not too far away and in long-term ownership. The chap told me he was only selling because of increasing years and lack of use. I asked if I could pop over and he replied that a previous viewer felt there was excessive play in the swinging arm. I suggested that I could easily deal with that, but no! the bike wasn't going anywhere unless it was perfect and he'd be in touch once he'd had a look himself. I never heard from him again, despite several calls.

I found another, in Scotland, wherever that is. Full of key phrases like 'must sell' and 'new project' – the one I overlooked was 'reluctant'. Apart from one acknowledgement that he still had it, every attempt to communicate was rebuffed. It's still advertised for sale at the time of writing.

Then, a real beauty popped up; better still, the vendor and I had previous form. We had a nice chat, agreed that our previous transaction was mutually satisfactory and, indeed, neither of us were timewasters; all very encouraging. He went on to quote me a price for it that was only slightly less than a Fabergé egg might cost, because 'I put so much time and money into it, Paul'. That's still for sale, too.

Onwards. I remembered another friend telling me he'd built a Triton, but I'd never seen him ride it. Suspecting that he secretly hated it, I made enquiries. Indeed, he still owned it, essentially unused since completion. We shadow boxed around a price, before he had a change of heart and decided to keep it – a bike he never rides.

Seems to me that Tritons, the very dictionary definition of specials, are imbued with a tiny portion of each owner's character, a percentage that increases with time. Unlike, say, a standard T120, which is easily replaced should one regret the sale, once your unique blend of British bike leaves the shed it's gone forever, taking a tiny piece of you with it. When it comes to the crunch, owners can't bring themselves to sell and instead prefer inventing faults, making excuses, or quoting astronomical prices, anything to stall the purchase.

A couple of months ago there was a lovely unit T120 Triton, tested by Stuart Urqhuart of this parish, further rubbing salt in the wounds. The final sentence contained a quote by the owner: 'This Triton is a keeper'. See what I mean?

Funnily enough, it's sitting in MY garage right now. Funny old world, eh? CBG

'When it comes to the crunch, owners can't bring themselves to sell and instead prefer inventing faults, making excuses, or quoting astronomical prices…'

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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TRIPLE TRAGEDY

To enthusiasts, the Rocket 3 is a true thoroughbred. Our man Melling argues that it was actually a compromise too far, one which contributed to the collapse of the old industry

Whatever happened to the (original) British bike industry? There's a theory that the three-cylinder 750 superbike should shoulder some of the blame

WORDS BY FRANK MELLING
PHOTOS BY CAROL MELLING / GARY CHAPMAN

One good reason for the death of the British motorcycle industry might well be the BSA / Triumph triples – a tragedy which would have made Shakespeare proud. Currently, the three-cylinder machines have a fanatical following and their acolytes will hear no wrong of them. However this is what Bert Hopwood, BSA Group engineering director, thought of the model in 1981: "The triple machine which found its way to market in 1968 was a flop and it was not until we reverted to the original prototype style that it started to sell and earn revenue. It (the BSA/Triumph triple) should have been in production in 1963, thus five years of production were lost, the Japanese became ever more firmly entrenched and our reputation suffered yet another severe setback."

So what went wrong? And what went right? Let's not forget that these machines achieved some outstanding results despite their haphazard development.

The wrong element is multi-layered but is centred around weak senior management and political in-fighting. There's an oft-quoted myth that Bert Hopwood and Doug Hele, Triumph's chief development engineer, were like father and son. This is wrong in fact. I came to know Doug reasonably well, and I was the last person to interview him just a few days before his death. Hele's view of Hopwood was unambivalent: he neither liked nor respected him.

This is how Hele described the much vaunted BSA MC1 which Hopwood had designed as a world beating racer. "It had a quite serious set-back, in so far as the valves were the wrong way round and so would not open. The radial valves couldn't work because they got entangled. But it was very stylish...

"The bike wouldn't have handled either. The original frame was very much like a 7R and simply would not have worked in a racing environment. Other than that, it was very stylish."

In 1962 Hele was headhunted from Norton by Hopwood. Doug jumped at the opportunity because Norton had been taken over by AMC and was becoming very much the junior partner in the enlarged company. Hopwood, to his credit, saw the end of the road for the 650cc twins. In particular, he disliked the harshness of the larger Triumph twins as ever more power was squeezed out of them. The problem was that the twins were the children of the autocratic Edward Turner whose word was law at Triumph – and within the wider BSA Group too. Senior management's adoration of Turner was to be a major issue in the triple tragedy.

Hele, an enthusiastic advocate for three-cylinder engines, felt that the only solution was to add another cylinder to the 500cc Triumph twin and provide a stop-gap triple until the planned ohc engines came on stream. Turner famously thought the idea "potty" – not for any engineering reasons but simply because the new engine was not a twin but a triple.

Regardless, Hopwood recalls the moment that the triple egg was actually fertilised. "One evening, late in 1963, after everyone had gone home, we sat in his (Hele's) office and to amuse ourselves we laid out the basic outline of what later became the 750cc, three-cylinder Trident. We thought that the result was very encouraging indeed, but in view of the rather abortive conversation which I had already had with the managing director (Edward Turner), this drawing was filed away as a memento."

In fact this is not what happened. Doug had a drawing board in his front room at home and there, in his own time, he drew the triple engine – and, in view of the constraints he was working under, he was very proud of the design.

This is Hele again. "He (Hopwood) was also keen to claim credit wherever possible. The Triumph T150 triple was entirely my design regardless of what Hopwood, or anyone else, said later. I drew the Triumph triple completely unaided and on my own."

Doug had the complete engine drawings finished by early 1964. It's worth remembering that this is a full five years before Honda's 750 four-cylinder machine and even a year before the Japanese factory's launch of the CB450 twin. This point needs stressing. Triumph could have been selling their 750cc triple when the biggest and fastest Japanese opposition came from the 450cc Honda. The BSA Group stood in front of an open goal, with the ball ready to kick and the opposition team not even in the stadium – but only by concentrating a lot of effort on the bike.

1: Even when it was new, the 8in 2ls front brake was old fashioned, but it worked effectively, as did the two-way damped front forks

2: The triple's styling was controversial in the late 1960s. These days, we've become accustomed to its appearance and unmodified first-generation triples attract a price premium as a result. Back then the Ogle Design petrol tank enjoyed the unflattering sobriquet of the 'bread bin'

3: The alloy rear light is one of the few bits of the Ogle design which hardcore BSAists liked at the Rocket 3's launch

Much as I admire Hele, and my admiration – and affection – for this wonderful engineer is truly unbounded, Doug was not a great designer. A more apposite description would be to say that he was the world's best garden shed designer, and the triple reflects this. As a piece of practical, cost saving engineering using the minimum of new tooling, the engine is the work of genius. Critically, it could have been garden shed cheap, as well as garden shed simple, to put into production.

Not that the first version of the triple engine was fit for purpose, because it wasn't. Norman Hyde was an apprentice in the Triumph experimental department and remembers that Hele's first version of the triple was full of faults.

In 1969 the new triple was clocked at 130mph at MIRA. Physically big and 60bhp powerful, the Rocket 3 and Triumph Trident bridge the gap between classic bikes and modern motorcycles

4: The clutch and four-speed gearbox function just fine, and the flexible engine thrives in third gear around town and on B-roads. But at high speeds the motor sounds and feels stressed and on motorways the lack of a fifth ratio really hampers the ride

5: The outdated Smiths speedo and tacho were hardly suitable for the flagship of BSA's range and the first British superbike

6: The Rocket 3's manual choke and steel control levers were pure 1950s. These days, that would be a selling point, a deliberate retro note. At the dawn of the Age of Aquarius they were simply out of date and oddly out of step with the bike's futuristic styling

7: Riders accustomed to Triumph's slimline twins would have found the Rocket 3 quite broad in the beam. That saddle proved to be decently comfortable on long hauls, however

Despite its quirky styling, or maybe because of it, the Rocket 3 is a strikingly handsome motorcycle

"There were problems with the oil pump which was of shaft drive design. The iron barrels were also a real issue and caused the cylinder head to leak. But the biggest issue was with the gear primary drive. The co-efficient of expansion of aluminium, and the distance between the crankshaft and the clutch, meant that the gear drive was never going to be successful – and it wasn't!

"The bore and stroke of the engine were altered from the original 63mm by 80mm, which was the configuration of the pre-unit Speed Twin, to 67mm by 70mm as used on the unit construction singles."

Despite the engine not being ready for production, Hele took the finished design into Meriden and there were two reactions. First, Hopwood took over the project and claimed credit for it. Secondly, it immediately became mired in BSA Group politics.

Edward Turner was nominally retired, although he did remain as a non-executive director of the BSA Group and his looming spectre still walked the corridors of power both at Small Heath and Meriden. McKinseys, US management consultants, were brought in to completely revamp the company. Harry Sturgeon was appointed group managing director. He came from the Churchill Grinding Machine Company, another BSA company, but knew nothing about motorcycles.

The politics are important to the practical story of the triple because all the BSA group senior management had bigger fish to fry than Doug's garden shed special. Harry Sturgeon was obsessive about increasing production and, from an outsider's point of view, Triumph were selling everything they could make… so what could possibly be wrong? As McKinseys tried to build a single, highly centralised motorcycle manufacturing entity within the BSA Group, so the infighting and desire to protect individual empires became ever more frenetic.

Some of the Rocket 3's styling touches looked old fashioned and home-spun at the bike's launch. An electric starter would have been a better selling point…

One triple prototype, the P1, was made. In a wonderfully ironic reprise of Turner's shoehorning of his Speed Twin engine into the chassis of Triumph's single cylinder Tiger 90, Hele squeezed the new three-cylinder engine into a Bonneville frame. And what a lovely thing it was too – very Bonnevilleish and yet clearly different. There were initial problems with the width of the engine and cylinder head gasket sealing, but these were quickly resolved and the bike was ready for production in the autumn of 1965, ready for the critical spring selling season in the USA.

Norman Hyde again. "The bike had flaws but we had skilled fitters who were capable of looking at fits and suggesting solutions to management. I was an apprentice but even I was involved in the discussions. Bert Hopwood would come down and say to me, 'Well young Hyde, what do you think of this?'"

So what stopped the triple going into production at this early stage? One important factor was the reorganisation of BSA Group's motorcycle manufacturing in an attempt to unify it. At the same time key managers were demoted or retired. Ariel was closed and the already tense relations between BSA and Triumph reached new heights. It was said, with a degree of justification, that Triumph would rather share their research with Honda than BSA – and, to be fair, vice versa was equally true!

Then there was a chaotic dilution of effort. Hopwood wanted a modular family of singles, twins and triples to be based around an 83cc single which would morph into a 249cc triple. There was to be an eight-speed, dohc GP racer and a six-speed sohc road bike. All this was wonderful – but nothing happened and meanwhile the eminently production-ready triple prototype remained at the back of the queue.

Turner also had his hand in the pie and, in semi-retirement, had designed the disastrous BSA Bandit/Triumph Fury twins which suffered from a multitude of engineering problems. Hopwood reported grim things about Turner's new twin to the BSA main board.

"The complete motorcycle (BSA Fury/Triumph Bandit) we have on test now has 5400 miles registered and in this mileage 3000 have been completed by a tester who rode most of the time at very low speeds because of the severe problems. The machine used four pints of oil every 100 miles and the tests are worthless because of a lack of power. The other 2400 miles by various riders embraced four complete rebuilds of the engine unit due to failures of the crankshaft, gudgeon pins and main bearings.

"The frame of the machine has already been redesigned due to excess flexibility in the main, which constituted a hazard and the front forks are also considered to be fundamentally unsafe."

Meanwhile, another shambles was taking place at Small Heath. Jeff Smith had won the 1964 and 1965 world 500cc motocross championships and BSA were determined to get a third world title – if only to put their sworn enemies at Meriden in their place! BSA competition manager Brian Martin's idea was to build the lightest 500cc motocross bike in the world. It was to have an all-titanium frame and the engine was largely magnesium and titanium. In terms of engineering, this was at the far end of cutting edge – and it was a disaster.

On paper, the bike was a world beater. Four-stroke pulling power and traction with the weight of a two-stroke should have swept all before it, but things went disastrously wrong right from the start and the Ti bike was soon scrapped. Not only did the Ti BSA consume a huge amount of money and engineering time but there was another, unreported, problem.

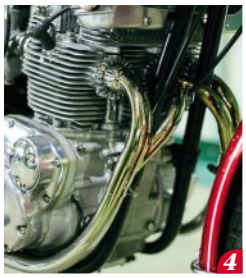
Before his untimely death I was very close friends with Fred Barlow who, as an apprentice, worked on the Ti project. Fred and I spent many happy hours discussing the tales of the numerous 'foreigners' which were done by BSA toolroom staff to help the race team. These unofficial jobs caused BSA works manager, Al Cave, to describe Fred and his race shop colleagues as 'the worst of professional thieves' because they not only stole materials but vital, and irreplaceable, toolroom time and staff, from production R&D effort.

Above: On the road, the Rocket 3 is an ebullient bend-swinger in the best British tradition. The motor supplies stacks of mid-range roll-on wallop and its weight is ideally distributed down low in the middle of the machine. The CB750, for all its technological sophistication, simply can't keep up on a series of switchbacks

Below left: Although the Zener diode's heatsink looks vaguely futuristic, the rest of the headlight area is a curious mix of ancient and slightly less ancient. At least the ignition switch is in a sensible place

Could things get worse? Well, yes they could. At the time, the distribution for the BSA Group products was chaotic. Triumph Baltimore and Triumph Los Angeles handled Meriden products while East Coast BSA sales were in the hands of BSA New Jersey and in the west by the privately owned Hap Alzina Company based in Oakland, California. If the rivalry between Meriden and Small Heath was fierce in England it was near psychopathic in the US, with each organisation running their own race teams and often battling it out for publicity with their sister company. It would have never happened in Japan.

The realpolitik of the situation was that any new BSA Group product which looked like a money spinner had to be given, in fair shares, to both BSA and Triumph dealers. This, I feel, more than any other factor, was the reason for the two different versions of the triple.



Meanwhile, in this maelstrom of political infighting and management ineptitude, Hele's garden shed special took a back seat, which was a real shame because the bike worked a treat. Now acceptably slim after some more Hele tweaking, the engine produced a reliable and consistent 58bhp at 7250rpm – against 45ish from a Bonneville – and was smooth and torquey. Almost as important, just like Turner's Speed Twin, the emotional gap from the old bike to the new one was narrow because the new triple felt very Triumphy. Again like a Speed Twin, the weight was perfect, being only 40lb heavier than a Bonnie. This meant that Triumph owners could have a much faster, smoother and sexier bike but one which didn't alienate them: perfect in every way for the 1965 season.

But no. That would have been too sensible.

The crunch came when Harry Sturgeon, who had been very ill with a brain tumour, announced the news that Honda were about to release a 750cc four-cylinder bike. Now this really was a gigantic tank parked on the BSA Group's lawn and the board went into full panic mode in an attempt to give their dealers something with which they could compete. In actual fact, it wasn't going to be a something but two somethings to keep American dealers sweet.

At this point in the story, it would be easy to criticise Ogle Design and the mess they made of the triples' styling. Certainly, at the time, I was right at the front of the loathing queue. As a sixteen-year-old, I knew what a British sports bike should look like and it was predicated on being sleek and feline with an undisguised eagerness to go fast. The triples did not hit that spot.

With the benefit of hindsight, and maybe even a tiny smidgen of wisdom, I can see what happened. In 1967, anything was possible – as long as it was 'modern' – and with a capital M. You could walk past a tip and see Victorian mahogany sideboards piled up for firewood simply for being old fashioned. Modern was good – and everything else was bad.

Ogle Design had already styled the Raleigh Chopper bicycle – a truly dreadful thing – and were now given the task of making the triples properly space age. The problem was that the brief from BSA was vague and confusing. Jim English, from Ogle, remembers the shambles. "We were told they (BSA) wanted a flashy American look, like a Cadillac. We really let our hair down doing futuristic stuff. I never thought that BSA would go for my flared silencer with three tailpipes. To be honest, as a motorcyclist, I thought that the Triumph they brought in (the P2 prototype) looked fine just as it was."

So instead of the lithe, slim, sporty and eager 120mph sports bike we all wanted, Ogle gave us a dumpy, square machine borrowed from a Flash Gordon comic strip – and we enthusiastically reviled it. Most of all we hated the ray gun silencers which gave the bike a big fat behind – and I'll not explore this area further!

If the styling was a mess, the specification wasn't much better. Let's reiterate the launch date: 1968. If the bike had been on sale three years earlier, things would have been very different. The problems began the moment a triple was wheeled out of the garage because the engines needed kicking into life: no electric boot here. The starting procedure was straight from the 1950s motorcyclists' handbook. 'Tickle' the outside of the two Amal carburettors – a wonderfully sanitised verb which meant that you held the float down until petrol slobbered all over your gloves and onto the engine.

Then set the cable-operated choke at quarter, half or three-quarter position according to the ambient temperature and swing the long kick-starter until the engine coughed into life. In 1958, this was acceptable. Ten years later it wasn't.

1: While they work perfectly well in isolation, and perform reasonably in pairs, Amal's Concentric carbs weren't actually intended to be used in trios. Access to the middle one is 'restricted', and setting them up can be 'entertaining'

2: The Rocket 3's 'Dan Dare' space age silencers which were so derided back in the day have become the bike's signature styling cue. These days people fit them to all kinds of classics

3: The infamous 'waffle' hand grips: the cheapest of cheap options intended to hide vibration

4: Three-into-four-into two isn't the easiest exhaust arrangement, but triples specialist LP Williams can supply high quality replacement downpipes from stock, along with many of the triples' other unique components

5: The Swinging Sixties, then. Did you know that the bike was wearing 'unique new Tripak dyno-tuned mufflers?' You do now…

6: The BSA interpretation of the triple engine, canted forward at 15 degrees, looks more sporty than the upright Triumph version. But both contained pushrods to overhead valves in their vertically-split crankcases, while Honda's 750/4 boasted horizontally-split, pressure die-cast casings and overhead cams

The triples were four-speeders which was inexcusable. Six-speed gearboxes were very well proven in racing. They could be bought over the counter by anyone with a healthy bank account from Austrian Michael Schafleitner from the late 1950s. In 1965, Quaife Engineering in England began making five-speed clusters, and these were used by Triumph for racing. An ultra-modern, space-age, flagship product absolutely demanded a five-speed gearbox.

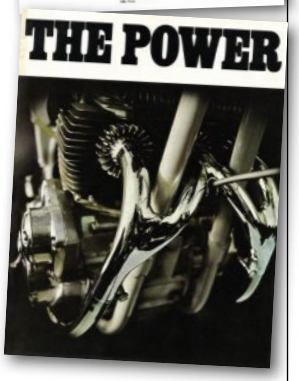
BSA also knew about disc brakes. They had used an Airheart disc on the ill-fated Ti motocross machine and their West Coast office was well aware of the Lockhart discs. Instead, they chose to use the 2ls front brake from the existing Bonneville range. Despite anything Ogle tried do with the styling, kick-starting a four-speed gearbox and drum brakes made the triple old fashioned at launch.

The BSA Flamboyant Red colour scheme was nicer than Triumph's and the 15 degree inclination on the cylinders also looked sportier than the Trident's upright cylinders. The BSA duplex frame was much racier. Given an alloy tank, a pair of clip-ons, some rear-sets and meggas and, despite the styling, my 16-year-old brain could see me riding a Rocket 3.

The problem was that, like all garden shed specials, the engine was a nightmare to mass produce. The two-valve, pushrod operated engine was superficially simple and old fashioned, but the asymmetric, vertically split crankcases were a cheap solution to expensive tooling. As for an electric starter, this was absolutely necessary – but only the Japanese would provide it for you.

Disregarding the triple's lumpen appearance, the rest of the cycle parts were actually rather nice. The Rocket 3 duplex frame was a typical BSA product and provided excellent handling. Interestingly, Norman Hyde – a Triumph man to the core – doesn't like it. Truly, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!

THE MOST POWER, THE MOST GLORY.


THE POWER

Below: Many of the Rocket 3's perceived problems have been tidily resolved over time. Modern gaskets minimise oil leaks and the troublesome triple contact breaker points have been replaced by fuss-free electronic ignition systems

Thanks to Lawrence Rose of Classic Motorcycles Ltd (01928 788500) for the loan of this truly stunning Rocket 3

Hele was very familiar with both the Oldani and Fontana brakes and you can see the Italian manufacturers' influence in the rough cast, 8in 2ls front brake from the 1968 Bonneville which is really rather good. Certainly, this race-derived stopper is light years better than the die cast, conical brake which replaced it. The 7in rear brake, although dating from the 1950s, works okay. The narrow front mudguard is really neat – by this point enthusiasm for the triple starts to build – until you reach the really crude Smiths speedometer and tachometer which, accompanied by crude switchgear and wiring, is straight back to the 1950s.

So what did you get for your £895? The first thing was a real shock. In 1966, the average annual wage – what a skilled tradesman would be earning – was £891 so it was going to take a whole year to buy a triple. Then you got what was effectively a Bonneville with an extra cylinder and one with styling you didn't like. Finally, quality control was extremely variable, so you could expect to be taking your lovely new bike back to a BSA dealer near you on a regular basis. Against this, the Rocket 3 was the fastest production bike readily available. It handled well and stopped too.

Today the package is better – but still much the same. There is no argument that a sublimely restored Rocket 3, such as the one seen here, is one of the most impressive classic motorcycles in the world. It's big, with a huge personality, and sits right alongside exotica like the Münch Mammut or MV Agusta America. Compared to the top hitters in the classic world, a truly top rate Rocket 3 is actually rather cheap at £15,000.

A well sorted triple is also one of the few classics capable of running right alongside modern retro bikes in terms of speed – certainly in licence retaining territory speeds. So, there is much to like and a lot to recommend the Rocket 3 – and then there isn't. The first-generation triple still has to be kicked into life, remains a four-speeder and is both wider and heavier than a Bonneville or Spitfire, and these, despite whatever triple enthusiasts might argue, are facts. I would have a BSA Spitfire every day; it's lighter, handles better, is virtually as fast and looks drop dead gorgeous too. And I'd enjoy looking at the £6000 I'd saved over the cost of a Rocket 3. CBG

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GLAD ALL OVER

A serious attempt at a whole new entente cordiale, hands across La Manche, things like that…

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART
PHOTOS BY KEL EDGE / ARCHIVE

Before establishing a modern day entente cordiale by teaming up with Brough Superior company owner Mark Upham to design and construct the born-again SS100, a quarter of a century ago Thierry Henriette created the only one of his numerous Boxer Bikes two-wheeled works of art to be powered by a British engine.

When he did so in 1993, it was as a conscious act of promotion for his new Road Masters dealership specialising in Eurobikes, located in a plush, modern building on the outskirts of Toulouse. Besides selling Bimota, MZ, Aprilia, Cagiva and Husqvarna models this was also not only France's largest Ducati dealer, but one of the top outlets in the country for the newly-revived Triumph marque, which John Bloor had brought back to the marketplace only three years earlier. Oh, and in case you wondered – no, BMW already wouldn't allow its bikes to be displayed on the same showroom floor as Triumph's, a policy which has persisted right up to today. So, no Boxers in the Boxer Bikes' subsidiary showroom…

.999.

The first Boxer Bike to be built around a Triumph motor was called the Gladiateur – as in the sword-carrying patron saint of England, St George. The engine Thierry chose was from a model that's since become a collector's item, the now very rare short-stroke four-cylinder Daytona 1000 which kicked off Triumph's revival, but was only catalogued for two years, from 1990-92. This and the longer-stroke 1200 Daytona four were supposed to be the means by which John Bloor could demonstrate to the world that the revived Triumph brand, whose return to the marketplace he'd spent the last seven years planning, was a thoroughly modern marque which looked forward rather than back – none of that pipe-and-slippers retro stuff, like the born-again Bonneville he was constantly being urged to produce, and eventually did in 2000, seemingly against his better judgement.

Under Bloor's control Triumph would be a match for anything made in Japan, and that meant developing four-cylinder models like the Kawasakis he and his engineers had spent months examining in a secret collaboration with the Japanese company. Fortunately, as things transpired, he also paid lip service to Triumph's more recent past by knocking a cylinder off each four-cylinder motor to produce both 750 and 900cc three-cylinder variants of the same engine platforms – and the rest is history…

However, although Road Masters was already one of France's top three Triumph dealers, Monsieur Henriette reckoned the British company was capable of so much more. "Triumph are already in danger of becoming stale and old-fashioned," he declaimed when I went to pay him my annual visit in 1994 to ride the latest product of his fertile imagination after its unveiling at the Paris Salon the previous October. "The Triumph 'méchanique' including their engines is superb, the finish is outstanding, the bikes are reliable – but the chassis and styling are boring and unimaginative. They have very conservative styling, and even though

Above: Not entirely slender and graceful, the Gladiateur could probably be described as being a very fast lorry

1: Certainly a bike of its time, the Gladiateur would appear to take few prisoners

ORIGINS

The original Triumph Daytona 1000 was a curious machine, with a remarkably peaky engine, unlike all the others in the early Triumph range

This was Triumph's idea of how they wanted their supersports litrebike to look back then. Among many criticisms was the fact that it didn't stand out from more pedestrian models

Seriously restrained styling and paint schemes failed to sell the idea of hyper-performance, although the Daytona 1000 was seriously rapid

An historical footnote: Motad supplied exhaust systems for many of the early revived Triumphs, and were indeed proud of that fact

they only have 1500 bikes a year to sell here in France, sales are declining because the initial excitement of seeing them back in the showrooms is over.

"BMW had the same problem, but resolved it by launching the new-generation Boxer and the Funduro F650 to create enthusiasm for the marque, with distinctive styling that sent sales climbing again. For every person who buys a bike because of its reliability or the way it performs, there are two more who buy it for the looks. That's why we made the Gladiateur 999, and the response has been incredible ever since we displayed it in Paris last September. We had so much interest from all over the world, from people who liked The Look enough to enquire about buying one. If a little company like Boxer can do this, why not Triumph?"

Viewed with the benefits of hindsight, Henriette's critique of Triumph's styling in the years immediately after Bloor relaunched the brand in 1990 are widely accepted, and it indeed took some years for that to be redressed. Mind you, back then while they were awaiting the new expanded factory to come on line Triumph could sell everything it made twice over, so you might have forgiven Bloor and his boys for declining to get too tweaked up about some bloke in France telling them their bikes look boring. A pity, though, because the Boxer 999 Gladiateur had some impressive styling credentials, as well as an equally admirable technical heritage. This was no Day-Glo Dream Bike, long on glitz and short on function, but a go-getting good-looker where the go matched the show. It deserved to be taken seriously, if only because of the three men who created it.

In addition to being a successful businessman, Thierry Henriette was also a bike junkie, who in a decade of building Boxer Bikes specials and small-volume production models had displayed a flair and originality that rightly brought him worldwide recognition. To create the series of Dream Bikes bearing the Boxer name – always employing Japanese engines until the Gladiateur – Thierry usually called on the services of his close friend Claude Fior, whose workshop at the Nogaro circuit was less than an hour away from Toulouse.

Fior was a visionary chassis designer par excellence, whose series of avant garde GP racers culminated in the construction of his own Marlboro-sponsored four-cylinder 500GP racer employing his trademark wishbone front suspension, which raced successfully for two seasons in 1989/90, frequently scoring points in the hands of the late Swiss rider Marco Gentile. Thereafter, Fior became a racing car constructor, working closely with Renault, for whom he built more than 60 single-seaters powered by the Clio 16V engine for Formula Renault racing, before then conceiving the radical Renault Sport Spider, over 1,800 examples of which were built from 1996-99. In between this, Fior found time to design and build the Gladiateur frame for his mate Thierry, who to clothe the finished product enlisted the services of one of the several highly-regarded young French designers he'd worked with over the years. ➧

2 & 3: Two ways of handling the same job. The mysteriously see-through lower fairing panels are certainly strange, even if the view within is uninspiring

4: Triumph's 4-pot engine was not a slender unit, so the super bodywork was never going to cut it in that department either

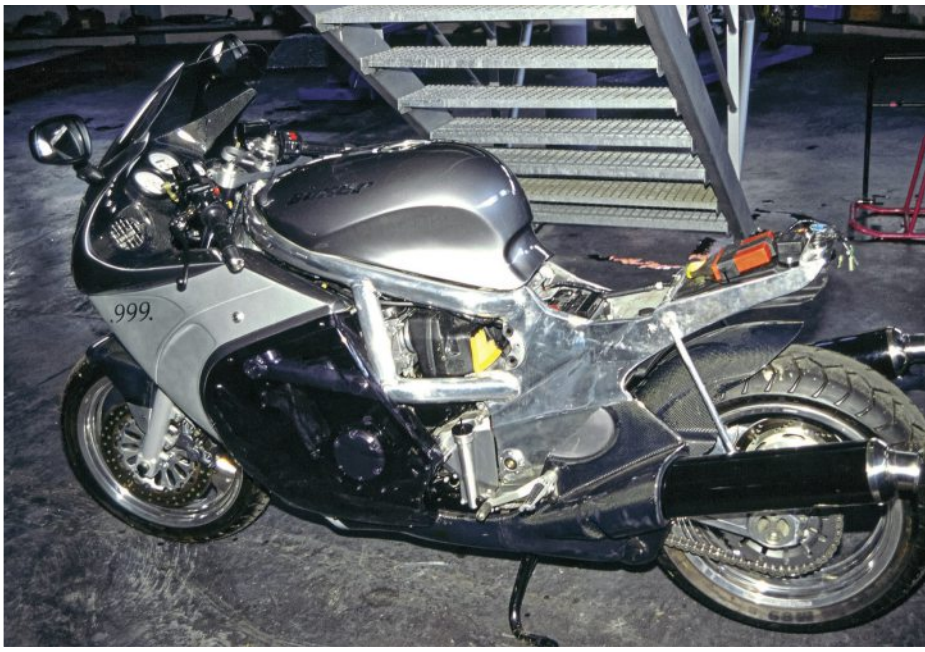
Below: Although the Gladiateur actually uses an engine from a crashed Daytona 1000, the original intention was to use the 900 three, as in the Trophy 900 parked alongside the Gladiateur here. The two machines surely do display different takes on styling!

That man was Sacha Lakic, who designed the ZXR750-based Spartacus show bike for Boxer Bikes which stopped the Paris Show back in 1991, and three years later still drew a crowd when parked out front of the Road Masters shop in Toulouse. Lakic's name would later become controversial, though, because at the October 1994 Cologne Show the first of the two bikes he'd been hired by Bimota to design for them was launched – the somewhat distinctive-looking Ducati-powered Mantra streetfighter which certainly got the boutique Italian bike brand some serious attention, not all of it favourable. From Boxer to Bimota – via the Gladiateur. Had the projected Bimota TB1 with a Triumph four-cylinder engine that the Italian factory wanted to build ever been produced, it wouldn't have been much different from what Lakic designed for Boxer Bikes.

But, why not a triple? "I wanted to base the Gladiateur on the 900 Trident," admitted Henriette. "But Triumph wouldn't supply me with engines – they said they needed all they could build for their own purposes. Originally, I'd projected the Gladiateur as a small-volume production model, like the Lamborghini, Axis and Vecteur we'd sold with Japanese four-cylinder engines in Fior steel frames under the Boxer Bikes name. It could still become that, but only if I can get a supply of three-cylinder Triumph engines committed. I know from the bikes we sell that the four-cylinder Triumphs aren't nearly so popular with customers, so I don't think there's as good a market for the Gladiateur in four-cylinder form. But because of Triumph's modular engine concept, our Fior chassis will accept their three-cylinder family of engines as easily as the four-cylinder Daytona 1000 power unit we ended up sourcing from a crashed bike to produce the Gladiateur 999 as a foretaste of what we can do once the triple becomes available. This is only a first step!"

Well, unfortunately that's not how it turned out, for Thierry never did get his triple treat. This made the chance to spend an afternoon riding the Gladiateur a question of what might have been, if only. Simply standing the Gladiateur alongside a stock Triumph Daytona 900 outside the Road Masters showroom underlined the difference in cultures and thus aesthetics between the two – it was a Triumph-engined sportbike with a pretty face, dressed in French haute couture.

To create the Boxer Gladiateur 999 (actually, 998cc, but who's counting?), Claude Fior had to grapple with the challenge of packaging the quite tall,



Above: Boxer's frame was somewhat different to the sturdy but conventional Triumph original, including some seriously stout stuff

Below: The man entrusted with the styling was Sacha Lakic, seen here with the Bimota Mantra, another of his designs

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relatively bulky Triumph engine to create a chassis design with much sharper steering geometry and more sporting handling than Triumph's conservative steel backbone frame, with its rangy build and kicked-out 27-degree head angle. To do so, he retained the 1000 Daytona's stock Kayaba front and rear suspension, as well as its extruded aluminium swinging arm, Nissin brake package, instruments, and wiring loom. He then fabricated his own aluminium chassis, using the trademark Fior format of a massive but stylish swinging arm pivot milled from solid alloy, with a tubular aluminium spaceframe from which the engine was underslung, forming a fully stressed member. Sacha Lakic's radical bodywork design clothed the result, but with a see-through bodice that Versace or Lacroix would have been proud of.

However, rather than Claudia Schiffer's cleavage or Linda Evangelista's bosoms the smoked Lexan side panels on the Boxer 999 gave you a flash of the handsome four-cylinder Triumph engine – only this time, there's no embarrassment if you're caught staring…

However, there would be if you tried to ride the bike at night, and discovered that the beam from the twin headlamps was carefully obscured by a similar sheet of smoked Perspex covering them. This was the only triumph (oops!) of styling over serviceability in a bike which was otherwise quite well thought out, with what was then the exotic medium of carbon fibre employed for the mudguards, instrument panel and belly pan. However, even with glass fibre bodywork and no real attempt at further weight-saving, the prototype Gladiateur tipped the scales at 205kg dry – a startling 30 kilos lighter than the stock Triumph Daytona 1000, representing a 15% weight saving over standard. Brembo cast aluminium wheels as then fitted to Ducatis completed the jigsaw, plus the rear light sourced from a French-built MBK scooter.

Initial impressions when riding this Anglo-French cocktail weren't too favourable, though, for just like a stock Triumph, the Boxer 999 still felt quite big and rather long – it was spacious without being welcoming. Its rangy 1480mm wheelbase was only 10mm less than the Daytona 1000's, and although its 760mm seat height was 20mm lower, there wasn't the reduction in physical mass compared to the standard Triumph that I'd expected. It felt just as big a bike as the Daytona, and compared to the slimmed-down Ducati 916 that had debuted on the world stage in tandem timewise with the Gladiateur, it seemed enormous. The riding position was quite stretched out, and the bike felt rather bulky and cumbersome at low speeds, added to which the short-stroke 1000cc Daytona engine (discontinued later that year from the Triumph range) didn't have a lot of zest. It needed to be revved quite hard to go anywhere, and there wasn't the punch of the longer-stroke 900 triple/1200 four family of Hinckley-built engines, although if you used the sweet-shifting six-speed gearbox hard, you could get it to motor OK. But a first acquaintance with the Boxer 999 in the streets of Toulouse had me wondering – why bother?

1 & 2: The Boxer uses original Triumph (Kayaba, in fact) suspension and Nissin braking systems front and back. The swinging arm is also an extruded alloy Triumph original, although its pivot is more substantial on the Boxer

3 & 4: The clock pack is also lifted directly from the Triumph original, and nothing wrong with that. Boxer cockpit area is neat and tidy, and presumably provides excellent protection from the wind

Below: This is a decently rapid riding machine, and although the frame is certainly strong enough, fitting a hefty centrestand did dire things to the ground clearance

The answer came as soon as we hit the high road. Faster is better, because then it all started to fall into place. Although it used the same suspension package as the standard Daytona, the Fior chassis felt much tauter and more responsive, with considerably sharper steering that was miles more precise than the stock Triumph frame's heavier, vaguer handling. The 23-degree head angle and reduced trail that Fior had used must have been mainly responsible for this, making the Boxer much easier to flick from side to side through fast, sweeping turns. It still felt quite bulky, because this was not a small motorcycle, but it didn't need nearly as much physical effort to change direction as the factory original. I have to admit ruing the fact that fate had delivered Triumph's 1000cc four-cylinder motor to Fior's workshop via the breakdown truck, especially in the 100bhp French-market restricted form prevalent back then, which probably accounted for the engine's rather gutless feel, compared to the 121bhp on tap from the derestricted version I'd ridden in England, because this was the chassis package that the 115bhp 900cc three-cylinder engine was crying out for, to match its torquier engine performance with uprated handling.

Above & right: The driving force behind Boxer is Thierry Henriette, at the time supremo of Road Masters, a premier dealership in Toulouse. M Henriette felt that the then current Triumph range could benefit from a little French style

That's not to say the Gladiateur was perfect, though, because it still had yet to be fully developed, to eliminate the countless little glitches you get with any prototype. I was the first person besides Thierry Henriette and one of his staff to ride the bike, which if he'd ever managed to acquire a supply of three-cylinder engines to put the bike into limited production, would have needed some serious troubleshooting to become customer-ready.

BOXER SNAPS

Above: The Boxer Ducati

Left: Boxer Superbob

Below: Boxer Vecteur

Above: The Boxer Kawasaki W800 Starck, complete with Henriette and Philippe Starck

Right: Boxer VB1

Below: Thierry Henriette today, in the new Brough Superior factory. "I regard the creation of the Brough Superior SS100 as the objective that my entire career in motorcycles was directed towards achieving," he says. "For the first time I and my colleagues have used our own engine to build a complete motorcycle that was designed and manufactured here in Toulouse. Even Mr George Brough himself didn't achieve that!" Indeed not….

The centrestand that was perhaps surprisingly fitted grounded out all too easily on the right, the rangy riding position needed improvement, perhaps by raising the footrests a little and pulling the bars back a touch, and while the front fork settings were fine, the Kayaba rear suspension needed sorting – the bike hopped and chattered the rear Michelin Radial over bumps, and seemed oversprung and underdamped. But the front brakes worked much better than on the stock Triumphs – probably because of the braided hydraulic hoses fitted on the Boxer, they had notably more bite. And in spite of its more radical steering geometry, the Boxer was extremely stable round fast sweeping turns, so the sharper steering hadn't been obtained at the expense of high-speed handling, and nor did the Boxer try to tuck in the front wheel braking hard into a turn. Claude Fior had waved his magic wand to good effect over the Gladiateur's chassis package, creating a spacious, comfortable mile-eater with refined handling – once the rear suspension was sorted – that also looked pretty dynamic, too.

So what then became of the Gladiateur project? Well, the next stage was obviously up to Triumph, and as it turned out the British factory wasn't interested in supplying any three-cylinder engines to Henriette – especially with their imminent move into the US market soaking up all excess production for at least the next couple of years. So the Boxer Gladiateur 999 project remained a tantalising one-off window displaying the potential of the Triumph mechanical package to sire a truly dynamic-looking motorcycle, which also offered a better set of road manners.

Today, the only bike made sits in the Brough Superior factory in Toulouse, overlooking a modern day two-wheeled entente cordiale that this time around, is actually happening. Vive la France – and God Save the Queen! CBG

The result of the framework and re-engineering, as well as a radical style revamp was this, the Boxer Gladiateur 999

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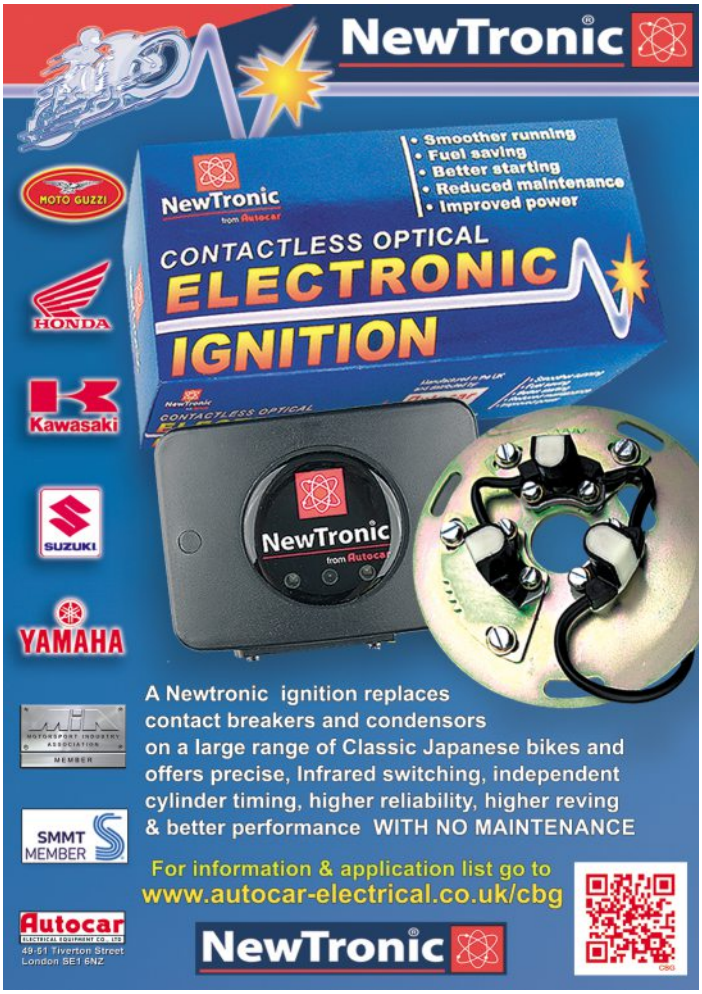

Japanese Classic Bike Guide

While British bikes dominated their home market and dictated motorcycle development for the first two-thirds of the 20th century, so the Japanese industry led the way from the late 1960s to the current day. That's why you'll find this guide is stuffed full of terms such as 'ground-breaking' and 'innovative' (although if the phrase 'jewel-like' sneaks in please take us out and shoot us).

However, the revolution in two-wheeled technology which ripped up the old rule book didn't happen overnight, and there are many – slightly dodgy, truth be told – transitional models along the way. Inevitably there are some humdrum, workaday 'so what?' motorcycles lurking among the genuinely astonishing trendsetters. The trick is to be able to tell them apart, and not pay Zed One money for a Z400J…

The transition to a Japanese classic machine isn't always straightforward, not for long-term British and European bike enthusiasts or even aficionados of modern motorcycles. It's not just a matter of the controls being in different places; the engine, braking and handling characteristics can be radically different.

Similarly, swapping to a 40-year-old machine that has led a hard life can cause considerable culture shock; riding a nearly new VFR800X today may not be adequate preparation for life with a CJ250T. Old bikes – no matter which country they come from – are snapshots from the past, encapsulating a particular period in motorcycle development. For many years, Japanese powerplants out-performed their bikes' suspension and chassis. They were a bit lively when they were brand new and correctly maintained, so imagine what they might be like after decades of wear and tear and bodgery…

Keep in mind that the Japanese classic support industry is not as mature as the network of trade specialists that provide spares and services for old Britbikes. There may be fewer marque and model specialists out there to assist you. Also, many Japanese models appear to have extremely long production lives – like some Brits – but in fact there can be very little overlap between different incarnations of a superficially similar model. Put simply: second-hand parts from a similar bike won't necessarily work. And remember that old British, Italian and German motorcycles were designed at a time when most maintenance was performed at home, by chaps in flat caps with minimal toolkits.

If you intend to revitalise an old but technically sophisticated Japanese motorcycle, crafted in line with an entirely different ethos, then it would pay to make sure that your local bike shop can help out with the odd stripped thread, snapped stud and emergency helicoil.

This guide will definitely develop over the coming months: if your favourite model isn't mentioned then feel free to send us the details for future inclusion.

How to use the guide

This guide provides a lightweight overview of a selection of Japanese classics. We focus on the marques and models that are the most popular, familiar and/or easily available in the UK. We'll enlarge and update it as time goes by and we trawl the marketplace, and this guide will alternate with similar info covering British and European classics.

We offer you just two prices; the *CBG* High Price is for a top-notch, top-spec model in excellent condition. You might not win concours awards with the bike, but you'd expect to be a contender. At that price, your target machine should have a new MoT, its tyres should sparkle, its chrome and alloy should be excellent. Its paint should not be dull, and it should run like the dream machine you're after. Oil should not dribble from its casings, it should start easily and readily. If it has more than one carb, then they should be balanced and the bike should tick over reliably. There should be no smoke, and although a stack of receipts is not essential, you should find evidence that whoever did the restoration work knew what they were doing.

Cables should be entirely un-frayed, the controls should fall readily to hand and foot, and the lighting system should both lighten the darkness and charge its own battery. Accept nothing less.

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

The *CBG* Low Price is for a complete motorcycle. The bike may have the dregs of an MoT. It will certainly run and ride, although it may not be entirely sorted. Most of all, it may not be standard, the engine and frame may not have been paired in the factory, it may be cosmetically challenged, with rusty exhausts, a split seat and drooping unlubricated cables, and sundry systems may not work. It may be a less popular version of a popular model (did someone say FT500?). 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're plentiful among older Japanese machines.

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.

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.

The third of the two categories is the 'unofficial' import. Lots of remarkable models were offered for sale in more adventurous markets than the UK, and many of them are now here. Spares can be rare...

Happy hunting…

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BRIDGESTONE

BEST KNOWN FOR its tyres, Bridgestone also built some nifty disc-valve two-strokes in the early era of Japanese motorcycle production. Like its British counterparts a half-century before, they began by building bicycles after the Second World War and added engines from 1958. Few were sold in Japan or Europe, but they gained quite a following in the USA thanks to their innovative engineering which broke ground ahead of the Big Four. 98cc and 175cc tiddlers are scarce and not especially rewarding to ride, but 350 twins are worth considering.

GTR/GTO

345cc rotary valve two-stroke twin || 160kg || 40bhp || 100mph || 1964-70

TECHNICALLY SOPHISTICATED, REFINED and civilised, the roadbike GTR was joined by the wheelie-happy GTO, with high pipes and bars, in 1967. Both employ rotary disc-valve induction to be both rapid and tractable, with smooth performance similar to most 500 strokers of the time. 'Upside-down' six-speed gearbox can be entertaining (or embarrassing). Rarely seen so correspondingly expensive to buy, maintain and restore. Sparse spares.

Prices
low £2500 || high £5500

HONDA

The greatest motorcycle maker the world has ever known, Honda has almost always led the field. There is almost no variety or style of bike which it's not built at some time. Often innovative (think of the oval piston racers) and often conservative (think of the CD175), but the machines are always well engineered, spares are usually available for an age after the bikes went out of production, and a look back down their long history reveals exactly why they have been so successful. They brought multi-speed gearboxes, overhead cams and disc brakes to the mass market, and they went liquid-cooled very early on.

That said, several Honda models suffered from ideas which worked well in the Big Book of Bike Engineering but rather less well on the road. The early disc brakes could be dreadful, with their single piston and pivoting callipers. Everyone knows of CX and VF camchain issues, while several ohc models suffered from premature top end wear, usually the result of neglected maintenance rather than bad design.

The support structure for Honda owners is excellent, with the VJMC leading the field as usual, and several expert traders around to supply the parts and the advice about fitting them. And there are so very many models which could easily quality for 'classic' status, that we have only chosen a few, not least because opinions are so varied…

C90/92/CB92

124cc ohc twin || 160kg || 68mph || 12bhp || 90mpg || 1958-64

NOT TO BE confused with the later Benly models, these early 125 twins are an ungainly mix of technical sophistication and angular styling. The pioneering twin-cylinder ohc machine came with all mod cons (electric starter and indicators among them) but was compromised by the its excessive mass, poor brakes, strange steering, under-damped suspension and a lack of low-down torque. The C90/92 Benlys represent a pivotal moment in motorcycling, but are nowadays probably best left to collectors / restorers. The snappy, supersports CB92 is much more sought after, especially on the classic racing circuit, for its twin carbs, 10k rev ceiling, and monster 2ls drum brakes: high-spec examples fetch five figures.

Prices
low £1500 || high £4500

CG125

124cc ohv single || 95kg || 120mpg || 65mph || 11bhp || 1976-on

SHARED MUCH OF the CB motor but replaced that machine's ohc arrangement with old-fashioned pushrods, making it a nigh-on indestructible learner hack. Gradual development over time: 12V electrics in 1985 when production moved to Brazil, electronic ignition in 1995, electric start from 2001. Cheap, slow, robust. Centrestands bend / break, and drive chain enclosure hides duff sprockets.

Prices
low £450 || high £1500

XL125-350

249cc ohc single || 120kg || 75mpg || 80mph || 20bhp || 1972-85

USEFUL RANGE OF tough, four-stroke trail bikes with decent low-rev torque. Long production life in a range of capacities including 175 and 185; learner 125s regularly converted to 150 so there's much scope for ample confusion with engine internals. Innovative four-valve ohc cylinder head prone to rapid wear if under-oiled. Proper dual-purpose machines, so great for green-laning: for more extreme off-road riding look for Paris-Dakar and XR models. Resurrected as the 'Degree' in the early 1990s.

Prices
low £1050 || high £2250

C70/C71/C72/C75

247cc ohc twin || 170kg || 70mph || 18bhp || 1958-67

GROUND-BREAKING OVERHEAD CAM twins, the original Dream, with pressed-steel frames and a remarkably revvy engine for 1957. For serious restorers / collectors only; a lot less fun to ride than their descendants and sourcing spares can be a struggle. Varied capacities (125, 154, 247, 305cc), wet sump from 1960, and different styles spawned the CB roadsters, CL trail bikes, CD commuters and CC street scrambler. Prices show wide variation between scrapheap survivors and concours queens; a fully rebuilt 1967 C72 250 costs c£3500.

Prices
low £1500 || high £7000

CB72/CB77

305cc ohc twin || 160kg || 105mph || 28bhp || 1960-68

THE CB TWINS marked Honda's first 'modern' sporting motorcycle with a tubular spine frame, 180° firing arrangement on the inclined wet-sump engine, twin carbs, electric start, 2ls front brake and tele forks. A genuinely tasty prospect, revving to 9000rpm and not overwhelmed by cumbersome weight.

Even the oddball kickstart arrangement doesn't spoil the fun as the electric start is (usually) reliable. Many adapted to go classic racing; original and standard spec machines are generally worth more. The 250 CB72 is genuinely capable of reaching 90mph; costs as much to restore as the CB77 but 15% less for initial purchase.

Prices
low £1500 || high £5000

CB250RS

248cc ohc single || 130kg || 90mph || 65mpg || 26bhp || 1980-84

NIMBLE, SPORTY LIGHTWEIGHT offering oodles more fun than the Superdream twin. Tends to be thrashed senseless so top end, chains, sprockets and brakes are usually well worn. RS-D from 1983 has O-ring chain and electric start but the kickstart models fire up easily anyway, so pay no extra for the D. Later dohc six-speed CBX version is less invigorating and popular.

Prices
low £1200 || high £2000

CJ250/360T

357cc ohc twin || 185kg || 90mph || 55mpg || 34bhp || 1976-77

THE AUSTIN ALLEGRO of old bikes. Cheap when new and far from cheerful, the final incarnation of an utterly out-moded design. Weirdly fashionable now with examples being restored to OMG! condition (presumably by people who never had to ride one back then). If you absolutely must, then get a 360. Or counselling.

Prices
low £1200 || high £3500

CB250/400T

395cc ohc twin || 180kg || 100mph || 50mpg || 43bhp || 1977-79

TECHNICALLY ADVANCED WITH five-speed gearbox, helical gear primary drive, three valves per cylinder, electronic ignition, Comstar wheels and disc front brakes. Far better than the outgoing CJ, but stodgy looking and not exactly lively. Can be considered 'charming' from some angles these days. Lived on for some years as the Hawk in the USA. Oddly interesting 400A (for automatic) used a two-speed torque converter to save on gear shifts. Ignored then but gaining a following now. Auto worth little more than the standard 400; 250 worth about 30% less than that.

Prices

low £1200 || high £3000

CB350/400F

408cc ohc four || 185kg || 98mph || 50mpg || 37bhp || 1972-77

NEVER AN OFFICIAL UK import, early 1970s CB350 fours are now regularly offered as resto projects after being shipped in from the USA (check it comes with the correct NOVA paperwork and all import duties paid). Less handsome and rewarding to ride than the more familiar 400/4, so budget for a 350's final value to be at least 20% less than the bigger bike. The 408 is similarly revvy and not as quick as it looks, but is pretty nimble and easy to manage, hence popular among smaller riders. Snazzy exhaust system costs a fortune; look out for sheared camchain adjusters and seized brake calipers.

Prices

low £3000 || high £5000

CB250/400N

396cc ohc twin || 175kg || 100mph || 45mpg / 43bhp || 1979-83

BETTER ALL ROUND than the Dreams with Euro 'big bike' styling but hard to love as a classic, especially the overweight, sluggish 250. Decent torque makes the twin-disc 400 nicer to ride. In fact, it's probably a better bike than the 400/4, but lacks the CB400F's panache and value. Hard to recoup the cash spent in a full restoration: only the most shiny bikes in original spec fetch top dollar. Many old hacks enjoy new lives as cafe-custom specials; worth half as much maybe, but often asking for twice as much.

Prices

low £750 || high £3050

CB450/500T

445cc dohc twin || 188kg || 110mph || 65mpg || 45bhp || 1965-78

EXOTIC WHEN LAUNCHED, if any one model sounded the death knell for the old British industry then it was the Black Bomber, which very nearly squeezed the performance of a big bike into a lightweight package. Double overhead cams and funky valve springs were the least of it; older riders may not have been convinced but fast lads grabbed the opportunity.

Revamped model from 1967 is the better bike, with five-speed gearbox, new carbs, more power. Unloved examples typically suffer top end failure. Many now being given a second life as smart specials. Evolved into the longer-stroke 500T in 1975 which although bigger was less powerful, slower, ugly and blighted with one of 'those' Honda camchains. Not to be confused with the much nicer 500/4, and worth significantly less than the 450 twin.

Prices

low £2000 || high £5500

VF400/500F

498cc dohc V4 || 185kg || 125mph || 45mpg || 70bhp || 1983-85

NIMBLE, FREE-REVVING SPORTS V4s which suffered by association with their bigger sibs but shared few of the top-end gremlins. Enclosed discs on the 400 are a pain, but otherwise the smaller bike out-performs the 500. Little overlap in components between the pair. More 500s on the market, prices roughly the same for either size. Not to be confused with more aggressive / extreme VFR/RFV models which followed.

Prices

low £1500 || high £2750

CB500F/550/650

498cc ohc four || 190kg || 110mph || 45mpg || 50bhp || 1971-85

LIGHTER, SMOOTHER, SMALLER, more revvy and only slightly slower than the first CB750, the short-stroke 500 Supersport was actually a spiffy middleweight which gets ignored in favour of the (now) more expensive 400/4. Go figure.

Clutch and transmission were improved for the 544cc CB550 from 1974, then the CB650 arrived in 1979 with a new frame and significantly different engine internals and four carbs. Plenty of affordable, scruffy 650s around, especially custom variants (look out for Nighthawks; they're fun); budget to clean and balance the carbs. Original and unrestored 500 and 550 values are similar, and rising.

Prices

low £1250 || high £6000

CX500/650

497cc ohv V-twin || 205kg || 110mph || 43mpg || 50bhp || 1978-85

PERHAPS THE MOST practical motorcycle of its time and curiously charming, in an ugly-duck way. Unlikely to be many left with top end troubles or big end knocks, but worth listening carefully to the engine in any case. High rev misfires often indicate alternator failure. Dodgy aftermarket pipes can strangle the mid-range. Placcy mudguards don't add to front end stability.

Better Eurosport styling arrived in 1982, but the 650 with 64 horses and Pro-Link suspension is The One To Have. SilverWing is a rather splendid small tourer. Turbo version requires dedication and application of ££ to keep in fine fettle but is better than the Suzuki or Yamaha alternatives. Not the most natural machine to turn into a cafe racer, but that doesn't discourage the brave…

SOLD AS SEEN

SUZUKI T500M, UK bike, 1975. Fully restored with MoT and V5 with matching frame number. Runs well from first kick. Engine rebuilt using a donor casing but otherwise original. Really easy summer riding; one of the classic blue smoking two strokers. **SOLD FOR £4200**

Prices

low £750 high £4500

XL500/600/FT500

497cc ohc single || 140kg || 90mph || 65mpg || 32bhp || 1979-88

XLS ARE SOLID dual-purpose big singles; less competent off-road than Yam's XT if somewhat more civilised and a sniff easier to kickstart. But even later Pro-Link versions with radial valve head, posh carbs and decompressor can still be a pig to fire up once warm. The underpowered, road-only FT flat-tracker got an electric starter (which often failed); developed an un-Honda-like reputation for unreliability and was shunned for several decades. Now flavour of the month, although it's still slower than an SR500. Which is saying something. Twin shock XL500s thin on the ground these days so prices refer to the XL600 and XL600R. Increasingly popular with modern tracker builders, too.

Prices

low £950 || high £2500

XBR/GB500

498cc ohc single || 160kg || 110mph || 44bhp || 1985-89

MARKETING MADNESS BLIGHTED a good roadbike when trad Britbike riders were told they'd like the XBR. Neither its styling nor free-revving engine characteristics appealed back then, but it's been welcomed with open arms by the classic crowd. Easier to live with than Yam's SRX600, although the Honda's starter sprag has been known to self-destruct. Heavy on chains, sprockets and brake pads, which indicates the

kind of use it gets. Reinvented as the GB 'Clubman' with retro styling and fussy wire wheels. Some 250 and 400 imports around; the 500 is the nicer bike and (we think) the XBR more honest than the 'tribute' GB.

Prices
low £1750 || high £4000

CBX550/750
747cc dohc four || 220kg || 130mph || 35mpg || 95bhp || 1981-1988

550 OUT-CLASSED BY Kawasaki's GPz, not helped by yet more top end trouble and the enclosed front disc brake which tended to overheat, at least in theory. 750 a better package all round; smooth and tractable if a bit flabby in the midrange (and be wary of engines which tick and tap). A safer bet than a VF750; always overshadowed by the VFR. Fully-faired Bol d'Or worth no more than standard half-faired 750s.

Prices
low £1250 || high £3000

CB750
736cc sohc four || 225kg || 120mph || 40mpg || 67bhp || 1969-1979

THE FIRST 750 superbike. Discuss. Honda startled the worldwide motorcycle establishment when it moved seemingly seamlessly from the familiar ohc twins to the first sohc four-pot monster roadbike. Effortlessly fast for its day, with dreamlike smoothness and a clever combination of trad and space-age styling to match its extraordinary technology. Despite the doomsayers, the four carbs stayed in tune, and the twinned primary chains ran fine, provided owners followed the maintenance schedules. They feel ponderous and heavy compared with the Norton Commando (but not the Triumph Trident), and as the suspension wears they wallow. No one cared much about that back then, and there's no need to worry now. the single front disc and its single piston caliper felt okay then, but rather less so today.

Charming machines of immense stamina. Honda took too long to replace it (with the CB750F/900F in 1979), but developed their machine steadily as the years and sales mounted up. There was also an automatic version. Golly.

Prices
low £1300 || high £10,000

CB750/900/1100
748cc dohc four || 236kg || 125mph || 45mpg || 77bhp || 1978-2003

FAR MORE AFFORDABLE than the single-cam 750s, the 16-valve twin-cam fours are more popular now than when they were new. The long-stroke 902cc version benefits from an extra 18 horsepower available lower down the rev range, more torque and almost no weight penalty, making it pleasantly lazy. By contrast the 750 Bol d'Or gained 8bhp but feels more stressed. 1100F version with 108bhp arrived in 1983 with TRAC anti-dive, box-section swinging arm and genuine 140mph performance. 900 worth 10% more than the 750; 1100 worth 10% on top of that. Listen carefully for camchain chatter; check that 900s especially cleanly engage all gears. Limited edition CB1100R of 1980/81 was a homologation special based around the 900: one for serious collectors only.

Prices
low £1200 high £4500

VF750S/F
748cc dohc V4 || 240kg || 125mph || 40mpg || 80bhp || 1982-85

CURSED WITH CAMSHAFT and camchain failures, the VFs still get sneered at, which means that tasty examples (with the top ends already sorted) can still be found for sensible prices. The super-smooth short-stroke V-twin steers a little strangely in its original S flat-tracker-ish format, but the revised F benefits from an additional 10 horsepower, a fairing, a much-improved chassis and suspension, if you can live with its 16-inch front wheel.

Prices
low £1500 || high £3500

VFR750
748cc dohc V4 || 198kg || 48mpg || 145mph || 105bhp || 1985-97

THE V4 WHICH finally resolved Honda's camchain crisis by combining the VF1000R's gear-driven cams with the VF750's engine layout in an all-new aluminium twin-spar wraparound chassis. A classic straight from the crate: fast, smooth, reliable and only improved by the 17-inch front wheel which arrived in 1988. Well-kept, low mileage examples are affordable and practical. Redesigned VFR for 1990 with single-sided swinging arm isn't necessarily a better bike. Genuine RC30 racers fetch monster money: for collectors only.

Prices
low £1500 || high £3500

GL1000/1100/1200
999cc ohc four || 260kg || 40mpg || 110mph || 80bhp || 1974-87

THE GOLD WING was the most sophisticated motorcycle of its time and the first Honda with liquid cooling and shaft drive. Physically substantial with commendably few flaws save a weak clutch on early examples. Initial models came naked; the 1100s from 1980 were the first with factory fairings and luggage. Values shown here for 1000s are highest for low mileage machines in standard trim, sans accessories; these bikes being bought by collectors. Long distance riders should go for fully-loaded 94bhp 1200 instead and save more than 50%. Budget to overhaul brake calipers and carbs.

Prices
low £3000 || high £7500

CBX1000
1047cc ohc six || 275kg || 40mpg || 130mph || 105bhp || 1978-82

BRUTAL BIG SIX demands dedication from its owner and benefits from modern suspension if you intend to unleash the engine's potential. Later faired B and C models came with upgraded brakes, forks and Pro-Link monoshock, but lost several million marks for lack of 'wow' factor, hence worth around 15% less than standard-spec Z models. Check starter motor performance carefully: don't believe the 'it just needs a new battery' blarney.

Prices
low £4000 || high £9000

KAWASAKI

Kawasaki Motorcycles (originally Kawasaki Aircraft) hit the rider radar when they acquired the makers of the Meguro, a four-stroke twin with more than a passing resemblance to the BSA A7. Still oddly popular in some quarters today, and oddly pleasant to ride. The early machines badged as Kawasakis were two-strokes, and indeed they swiftly gained a reputation for fearsomely quick machines with their 500 and 750 stroker triples, with journalists falling over themselves with superlative overload. And indeed they were very rapid for their day. Reading the environmental writing on the wall, Big K dived straight into the rapidly emerging superbike market, trumping Honda's CB750 with their own Z1 / Z900, which was bigger and boasted an extra overhead cam. The flagship did what flagships

SOLD AS SEEN

YAMAHA XS250, 1981. Café racer, bobber. Matching numbers, a few things changed to give it that old school look. New MoT. Everything works. Carbs could do setting up properly, it still runs ok just needs the tickover sorting. Just finished the bike, so might need odd little tweaks. **SOLD FOR £1800**

do, and dragged sales of the marque's smaller machines along as it progressed through the markets of the world. Big, brash and heavy, the Big Zed is a major player today, too. As well as the famous heavyweights, Big K also supplied loads of reasonably conventional singles, twins and fours, and indeed they still do, although their sporting rep was further boosted by the GPz and GPZ machinery, all of which have their followers in the classic world.

Z250 / GPz305

306cc ohc twin || 164kg || 65mpg || 100mph || 36bhp || 1979-97

NEAT AND NIMBLE, the expensive Scorpion never troubled Honda's domination of the small four-stroke market although it's a nicer bike in our view. Cut-price plain-Jane Z250B nowhere near as nifty. Final GPz incarnation offers most torque and snazzy styling, and was successful enough to stick around for the long haul. Belt drive rarely a problem; top end highlights neglect and abuse.

Prices

low £950 || high £1500

A1/A7

338cc two-stroke twin || 160kg || 30mpg || 110mph || 42bhp || 1966-71

SAMURAI 250 VERSION arrived slightly ahead of its 350 Avenger sibling, both well finished and smoothly swift thanks to twin carbs, disc valve induction and Injectolube oiling. Decent front brake matches their laudable performance. Less savage than the snappy triples which followed, but far fewer twins were sold new or are available now. Lively, light and easy to live with. Little difference between 250s and 350s in price: condition more important, and high-pipe examples tend to attract more attention.

Prices

low £5000 || high £8000

S1/S2/S3

400cc two-stroke triple || 160kg || 30mpg || 110mph || 38bhp || 1973-79

IF YOU WANT outright performance then buy an early S-model, because the small-capacity triple strokers lost horsepower and gained mass over time. The 32bhp S1 250 was good for almost 100mph and certainly sounded as if it was about to go into orbit. S2 was a 350 version, but the choice for classic riders has to be the torquier (everything is relative) S3 with its bigger carbs. Better handling than the heavier four-strokes of the period, but utterly desperately atrocious fuel economy. Ignition famously hard to keep timed right; spark plugs equally famous for fouling. Renamed KH from 1976; the final models are undoubtedly slower but surprisingly charming if you're looking for an affordable, compact classic two-stroke. Prices are for the final, electronic ignition KH400.

Prices

low £1200 || high £5000

Z400/440

443cc ohc twin || 180kg || 45mpg || 115mph || 41bhp || 1974-84

AN AMAZINGLY AVERAGE motorcycle, the twin-cylinder Zeds looked vaguely British to begin with, 'modernised' with cast wheels and square styling, then switched to factory custom guise with belt drive. Six-speed gearbox and 440 engine from 1978. Can be attractive to Britbike riders looking to replace heavyweight twins with something lighter and easy to start. Values rarely support the full cost of a restoration, however.

Prices

low £500 || high £1200

Z500/550/GPz/GT550

553cc dohc four || 120mph || 200kg || 58bhp || 1978-00

ALMOST INDESTRUCTIBLE RANGE of middleweights. Early Zeds were solid stalwarts, first GPz was a stunner. H1 version got Uni-Trak rear end, then more power with 26mm CV carbs. Many since modified, chopped and bobbed; Z500/550s make a solid basis for a custom project. Find an unmolested GPz550 for a genuine pocket superbike at affordable prices. Shaft-drive twin-shock GT proved massively practical and long-lived; still viable as a classic tourer.

Prices

low £950 || high £2500

SOLD AS SEEN

KAWASAKI S1C 250, 1975. Unmolested 70s 2-stroke triple. Retains much of its original character. Runs and sounds beautiful. Sympathetically restored. Refurbished carbs, oil pump, original fork stanchions rechromed. New front and rear mudguards. 9 months MOT. Ready to ride away! **SOLD FOR £3000**

W1/W2/W3

624cc ohv twin || 180kg || 110mph || 50bhp || 1965-74

A DEVELOPMENT OF the Meguro 500 twin, easily mistaken for a BSA A7, in the dark at least. Mainly sold in the USA, with a range of specifications including twin carbs, high pipes, and twin discs. Challenging to restore correctly; barn-find imports won't be straightforward to complete.

Prices

low £4000 || high £8000

Z650

652cc dohc four || 210kg || 120mph || 65bhp || 1976-83

HANDSOME AND SOLIDLY built, the Z650 is the obvious alternative for anyone who can't afford a Z900 or prefers a better balanced package. Initially came close to squeezing 750 performance into a 500-size chassis; then was overshadowed by the Z750 from 1980. Early 650s look more classic; post-80 models come with better brakes, electronic ignition, CV carbs, etc. SR and Custom versions significantly cheaper than pretty wire-wheel roadsters. Z400J with 43bhp from 1980 was effectively a miniaturised 650 with very little to recommend it.

Prices

low £1250 || high £4750

W650

676cc ohc twin || 195kg || 50bhp || 1999-2010

TIDY MODERN RETRO with convincing styling, decent performance and a considerable cult following. Most owners will tell you it's better than a Hinckley Bonnie; certainly more popular than the lacklustre Zephyr fours. Scruffy ones not too tricky to transform into cute cafe racers.

Prices

low £2500 || high £4500

H1/H2

748cc two-stroke triple || 190kg || 30mpg || 120mph || 74bhp || 1969-75

THE STUFF OF legends: monster performance from both 500 and 750 strokers. The original screaming meanies which go like stink in a straight line and give riders heart failure when they wheelie in corners. Modern suspension upgrades temper the excitement somewhat, but standard / original bikes go for more money. 750 has longer wheelbase and better steering geometry so is a little less likely to spit you off than a grumpy 500. Both deliriously exciting. Oh, and bits fall off, pistons melt, eyeballs bleed and they cost as much in petrol as they do in spark plugs. Stainless brake lines give a bit more bite to the overworked single disc. Later models mildly more subdued but with nicer styling. KH500 almost civilised. If you find a 'for resto' example, budget for a rebore, new pistons and all seals…

Prices

low £5000 || high £12,000

Z750
745cc dohc twin || 230kg || 55mpg || 120mph || 55bhp || 1974-78

WHAT COULD'VE BEEN a 'modern Commando' was always overshadowed by its super-successful four-cylinder siblings. The overweight twin is much slower, and the bonus of decent low-rev torque is offset by horrible high-rev vibes and lumpy delivery from CV Mikunis. Still cheap and, like Honda's VF750s, can be rewarding if you're prepared to tinker. Do not dismiss them because of their stodgy rep; they're better than that.

Prices
low £1200 || high £3000

Z750/GPz/GT/Turbo
738cc dohc four || 217kg || 36mpg || 135mph || 86bhp || 1981-86

UNLIKE THE 500/550 fours of this period (where the GPz was massively faster than its Zed counterparts), the 750 ranges are much more evenly matched in terms of performance. Still some bargains to be had in the shape of early slab-sided Zeds, then. Rattling camchains seldom cause Honda-style catastrophe. Best all-round package is the A1 Uni-Trak GPz (prices shown). ZX750 Turbo is easily the best supercharged machine of its time with an uprated chassis to match the 150mph motor; needs expert mechanical attention and costs a minimum of £6000 in decent condition.

Prices
low £1750 || high £3000

Z1/Z900/Z1000
998cc dohc four || 222kg || 37mpg || 135mph || 102bhp || 1972-83

BEFORE SPENDING THE thick end of £20k, be certain that you definitely want a Z1A or B, and that's what you're actually looking at.

Z900 from 1976 (smaller carbs, more mass, better roadholding) costs between £8000 and £14k, and prices overlap with the Z1000 (£6000 to £10k). Ltd custom versions all worth 30% less. Our fave is the Z1000R Eddie Lawson rep; a brutal muscle bike providing massive performance for your money. Again, check its provenance before paying full ticket (prices below) for what may only be a smart paintjob.

Prices
low £3750 || high £6000

GPZ900R
908cc dohc four || 228kg || 40mpg || 110bhp || 150mph || 1984-99

IF THE 750 Turbo and GPz1100 were the last hurrah of the old UJM, then the Ninja was the shape of everything to come. A truly ground-breaking bike and a realistic all-rounder, although the 900R possesses rather less character than its air-cooled compatriots. Dropped the 16-inch front wheel in 1989.

An infinitely better bike than the 1000RX which succeeded it. A couple of zero-miles, unregistered examples changed hands at auction for well north of £10k, but the long model life and vast numbers sold keep mainstream values entirely affordable. Similar style water-cooled 750R wasn't a hit when new and is hard to recommend now.

Prices
low £1550 || high £5000

Z1300
1286cc dohc six || 300kg || 40mpg || 120bhp || 140mph || 1979-89

HUGE AND HEAVY but blessed with better road manners than you'd initially imagine. Engine utterly effortless when running smoothly (the three carbs do not always co-operate). Fuel injected version from 1984 got 10bhp boost. Complex hy-vo cam drive makes engine work a challenge.

Prices
low £5500 || high £9000

SOLD AS SEEN

HONDA CX500, 1980. 12 months MoT, Motad 2 into 1 exhaust. Just serviced; Rock Oil 10w 40, new oil filter, plugs, air filter, battery. Brake fluids changed plus general key service. 2 previous owners, very low mileage, plenty of history including handbook, original bill of sale, 2x keys. **SOLD FOR £1600**

LILAC / MARUSHO

LILAC BIKES WERE BUILT by the Marusho business from 1949 and featured the firm's trademark shaft drive.

Starting with a simple 150cc single, they progressed to small transverse V-twins similar to those built by Victoria Bergmeister, and Zundapp-inspired 350 flat twins.

Economic glitches stopped Lilac production in 1961 although Marusho continued supplying components to Honda, and returned in 1964 with a 500 horizontally opposed twin.

Plagued by teething troubles, the 500 is of technical interest as it uses Marusho's own clutch and transmission design, and novel ignition and electrical systems.

Marusho was also ahead of the game by introducing an electric-start 'Magnum Electra' in 1967, but production ceased permanently soon after.

Bikes were badged as Lilac or Marusho depending on the market. Few imported to the UK; V-twins are especially sought-after by collectors. Prices typically in the £5000 region for most 1960s twins; dedication required to source components.

MEGURO

BEST KNOWN FOR its copies of BSA parallel twins, Meguro began as an automotive parts manufacturer in 1924 and developed its first models from 1937. Started postwar production with a range of small ohv singles, then went racing in the 1950s, produced a 500cc ohc racer, and developed a series of British-inspired parallel twin roadbikes.

The first pre-unit style 650s of the late 50s were followed by the K-series 'Stamina' 500 models (based around the BSA A7) in the early 60s. By then, Kawasaki had absorbed most of the Meguro concern, so that the K2 was as much a Kwak as it was a Meguro, and lived on as the W-series Kawasaki twins. Restoring and running a Meguro would be something of a challenge today, but some K projects do come onto the market and fetch anything from £1500 upwards depending on how much of them is missing.

RIKUO

PARENT COMPANY SANKYO imported Harley-Davidsons to Japan through the 1920s, then bought the rights to manufacture Harley V-twins in the 1930s and established one of the first purpose-built motorcycles factories in Japan. Models included the 1200cc VL sidevalve solo and Type 97 for military sidecar duties. Pre-1942 production totalled around 18,000 machines. Postwar, Rikuo continued making 750 and 1200s, as well as commuter mopeds and BMW-inspired shaft drive single-cylinder 250/350 ohv models. Production ceased in the early 1960s after the company had been sold to Showa. A 1939 1200 V-twin will set you back the better part of £20k if you ever see one for sale. Some grotty 'for restoration' examples pop up

on eBay and are likely to get rebuilt with Harley parts.

SUZUKI

Suzuki has been around for a lot longer than you might think. The firm's motorcycles were originally imported into the UK as a joint venture with AMC, British owners of Norton, AJS, Matchless, Francis Barnett and James, and as was the way, most of their early machines were solidly based on the lucrative commuter market, and were two-strokes. Inevitably, they went racing, presumably to improve the breed, and became entirely proficient at building high-performance strokers.

Their range of sporting triples was a little overshadowed by Kawasaki's, but the GT twins were successful enough. They clung to the idea of stroker superiority in a commendable way, eventually seeking to avoid the legislative appeal of the four-stroke with the only Wankel-engined machine put into production by a Japanese major; the RE5, which was built in parallel with their excellent GT750 water-cooled stroker triple. The RE5 failed, and Suzuki followed the four-stroke path, producing several excellent if unremarkable machines.

The phenomenon which was B Sheene MBE racked up the image of Suzuki as a builder of excellent racing two-strokes, just as production shifted to four-strokes. The GS and GSX ranges proved to be popular, and they shifted seamlessly enough into the liquid-cooled generation with the GSX-R machines.

T20/T250

247cc parallel twin two-stroke || 135kg || 40mpg || 29bhp || 95mph || 1965-68

AKA THE SUPER Six (or the Hustler in the USA), a technically advanced six-speed 'square' stroker with early Posi-Force injection. Developed from the T10 but almost entirely different. One of *MCN's* Bikes of the Year; a genuine ton-up 250 with decent brakes. Many were converted to 'racing' spec – try to avoid buying one of those for a project if you fancy building a road machine. Successor T250 / Hustler and T350 Rebel typically more affordable.

Prices
low £1250 || high £4000

GT250/X7

247cc twin two-stroke || 145kg || 40mpg || 30bhp || 100mph || 1973-83

INITIALLY UNDERWHELMING COMPARED to the Super Six, the Ram Air models evolved into the GT250A for 1976 with bigger carbs, beefed up bottom end and perkier performance. Best of the bunch is the 1978-on X7 with lightweight frame and reed-valve induction. Compact and characterful with an extremely respectable turn of speed.

Prices
low £750 || high £5000

SP370/400

367cc ohc single || 120kg || 60mpg || 25bhp || 80mph || 1978-80

TIDY DUAL-PURPOSE TRAIL / road tool. 400 introduced in 1980 with decompressor (so easier to start) but less power and lower top speed. Replaced by the DR400 which was better at everything and tended to get thrown at the countryside in pukka trials, so SPs frequently less beaten up and still affordable. Values much the same for 370 and 400.

Prices
low £1200 || high £3000

GS400/425

423cc ohc twin || 175kg || 45mpg || 38bhp || 96mph || 1976-80

UNREMARKABLE TWIN-CYLINDER ROADBIKES which handled well but were sometimes hard to start and thirsty with flabby performance. Tweaks for the 425 version in 1979 barely improved things. GS450 which followed was better but shares few engine components with 425. Four-valve GSX models with TSCC were more complex but provide better performance. Even so, none of them are sought-after and certainly not worth the cost of a pukka restoration. Cheap basis for a flat-track or bobber project, but still bland and basic.

Prices
low £750 || high £1250

T/GT500

492cc twin two-stroke || 176kg || 42mpg || 47bhp || 100mph || 1967-77

MILD MANNERED ALL-ROUNDERS, nothing like the screaming strokers which would follow in subsequent generations. The first Titan / Cobra tended to vibrate, used Suzuki's weird kickstart set-up and shared its weedy front brake with the much lighter 250. Big revamp for GT in 1976 with new suspension, electronic ignition and disc brake, if less power, lower top end, dodgy stopping in the wet and the same old vibes. Foot controls can be arranged to suit Britbike riders. A few genuine Crooks racers fetch double the value of the best roadbikes.

Prices
low £1200 || high £4000

RE-5

497cc rotary || 230kg || 35mpg || 62bhp || 110mph || 1973-77

ODDBALL ROTARY ENGINED tourer, suitable for serious enthusiasts only. Smooth motor but strange sounds; uses as much oil as a two-stroke. Lots of torque and decent handling, odd engine harmonics around 4k are normal. Engine spares hard to source. Best used on regular long runs rather than occasional local jaunts. Requires informed mechanical attention. Unless you're a rotary fan, the Kettle is a better bet.

Prices
low £3500 || high £8000

GS550/650/750

748cc ohc inline four || 220kg || 45mpg || 72bhp || 115mph || 1976-84

SOLID MIDDLEWEIGHT FOURS, the typical UJM if ever it existed. Well engineered with stable handling matched to respectable performance; pleasant to ride if a bit bulky for smaller owners. Originally weak electrics massively improved by modern kit. 550 has chain drive and six speeds; five-speed 650 and 750 more relaxing. Took longer to be considered 'classic' than CBs or Zeds, hence values still lower. Best of the bunch is the shaft-drive 650. Katana versions typically fetch 15% more than roadsters. Lots of brats and cafe customs (of varying quality, so worth checking in person) on the market.

Prices
low £750 || high £4000

GT380/550/750

738cc triple two-stroke || 230kg || 55mpg || 67bhp || 110mph || 1971-78

THE BIGGEST TRIPLE arrived first to create the cult of the Kettle. All are relatively smooth, reliable and rewarding to own and ride. Bigger models came with electric start; 380 has an extra gear; only the 750 is water-cooled (smaller pair get Ram Air instead). Braking options vary from fade-fast drums to scary stainless steel discs. Components differ across the range and through model years so check compatibility carefully, especially if you'be bought an import from the US or Japan. Kettle is justifiably sought-after and prices are double those of the 550 (shown below). Dunstall racers worth about the same as standard-spec 750s. 380 values are around 15% lower than the 550. If restoring, be aware that only the 750 is likely to repay the full cost of a concours resto.

Prices
low £1500 || high £6000

XN85

673cc turbo four || 250kg || 35mpg || 85bhp || 130mph || 1983-84

SUZUKI'S DISMAL STAB at a turbo, based around the GS650 engine which ended up in a GSX frame with 16-inch front wheel, monoshock rear end, anti-dive forks and nastily diluted KatLite styling. Horrible to maintain: performance on a par with any normal 750. Possibly better than the Yam XJ turbo but more troublesome than Honda's CX Turbo and with none of the wow factor of the Kwak. Strangely, some people pay lots of money for them.

Prices
low £2500 || high £7000

GS850/1000/1100

1049cc ohc inline four || 230kg || 45mpg || 95bhp || 130mph || 1979-88

SENSIBLE SUPERBIKES WHICH are nearly as quick in the real world as their brasher competitors, and often easier to maintain at home. Physically big, but easy to handle once on the move. Superb for touring and travel, less great for posing and quick sprints. Excellent value; highly durable. A real working classic. 'Wes Cooley replica' 1000S normally priced higher than standard machines but dinky fairing doesn't help the handling.

Prices
low £1200 || high £4500

750/1000/1100 KATANA
THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER iterations of the GS line. All the core attributes of Suzi's best UJM combined with admirable function and eye-catching styling. The very definition of a Japanese classic. True aficionados disparage the 750, so these are the most affordable (and easiest to ride, as they're a generation younger with swifter steering).

Homologation special 1000s are extremely scarce. 1100s more common (prices below) but look out for lower-horsepower Japanese market imports. Original exhausts extremely hard to come by. Sidepanels and indicators frequently come a cropper. Pop-up headlight on 750 often doesn't (pop, that is; up or down). Later GSX400S Katana brilliantly mimics the original styling in a more modern, compact package if you want to pay a third the price of a 'proper' Kat.

Prices
low £3000 || high £10,000

YAMAHA

Yamaha's corporate logo involves three piano tuning forks. Back then it was a common device to suggest that this was the top company for tuning, mostly two-strokes, where serious power depends largely on tuning the exhaust system to act as an extractor. As with Suzuki, Yamaha made their inroads into the world's motorcycle markets with a wide range of simple two-stroke machines, but moved decisively into the four-stroke world with their XS twins, the 650 aimed directly at the trad Brit market.

It produced a couple of excellent dohc triples, while clinging to the two-stroke racing heritage for longer than most with the excellently exciting RD series, culminating in the RD500LC, one of the definitive race-developed motorcycles. As the 1970s expired and hauled into the 80s, they showed some serious flair with their bigger models, an all-time *CBG* fave being 1985's V-Max.

The world has never been quite the same since…

DT125/175/250/400
171cc two-stroke single || 100kg || 16bhp || 1974-86

INITIAL DT1, CT2 and DT twin-shock models look handsome but have very limited off-road capability; can be useful lightweight classics for rural road riders. For off-road riding, the best of the bunch is probably the second-generation 175 from 1977 (prices shown), which became the MX in 79 with proper trials mudguarding and monoshock rear end. 250s and especially 400s can be tricky to start warm.

Prices
low £1250 || high £2750

RD125/200
195cc two-stroke twin || 140kg || 22bhp || 85mph || 1973-80

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE YAS/CS range with 'torque induction' reed valves and (unusually for such small capacity machines) electric start. Kept drum brakes initially, unlike the disc-braked RD250. Also benefitted from more torque, less mass and a shorter wheelbase than the bigger RDs, hence remarkably peppy performance. 125s rarely seen (mostly blown to bits by later learners) but 200s developing a dedicated following.

Prices
low £950 || high £2500

RD250/350/400
398cc two-stroke twin || 160kg || 40mpg || 40bhp || 105mph || 1973-81

THE ICONIC AIR-COOLED 'Race Developed' series started with the reed-valve 100mph 250. 350 was not much faster but benefited from tweaks including a genuinely effective twin-piston front brake. Beware bodged conversions from early five-speed gearboxes: UK bikes were six-speeders from 1975. Wheelie-beast 400C with signature squared-off styling, rubber-mounted engine and masses of torque arrived in 1976 (prices shown). E models come with electronic ignition and nasty sliding caliper disc brakes. Heaps of 250s around: £3k secures a well-restored example on eBay. 350s and 400s more commonly found at dealers these days.

Prices
low £1750 || high £5000

XS250/400
399cc ohc twin || 170kg || 50mpg || 45bhp || 95mph || 1976-84

FIRST INCARNATION WAS not entirely unlike Honda's Dream twins, but possessed zero charisma and was notably sluggish even with a six-speed gearbox. Early 360 version converted to a 400 in 1977, then replaced by a new version from 1982 with scarce parts compatibility between them. Cheap. Not cheerful.

Prices
low £500 || high £1500

RD250/350LC
347cc two-stroke twin || 140kg || 40mpg || 60bhp || 115mph || 1979-96

AN UTTER STUNNER from its inception; slim and nimble with potent power and superb steering. YPVS arrived in 1983, pushing the rev ceiling towards 10k, matched by a highly revised chassis, rear disc brake and finally a full fairing. Brazilian-built RD350R almost made it to the 21st century.

Bodywork likely to be battered and now quite fragile, brakes and suspension benefit from modern upgrades. Best bought in person from an enthusiast owner who's kept on top of maintenance (especially decokes, piston rings, etc). Test ride extremely useful to check correct Powervalve operation. Watery brown fluid in engine oil suggests coolant seep from blown seals. Unless you absolutely *must* have the neck-snapping experience of a YPVS (prices shown), then a standard LC comes with half the technical hassle for two-thirds of the price.

Prices
low £3000 || high £6000

XT/SR500
499cc ohc single || 158kg || 50mpg || 33bhp || 90mph || 1976-99

FAMOUS FOR ITS obstinate refusal to fire up from warm, the early XTs were handsome twin-shockers more suited to byways than actual green lanes.

Joined by the roadbike SR in 1978 with more power and better electrics, but still requiring 'the knack' to kickstart successfully. SR resurrected in varying capacities since then, including dubious 'Gold SR' Brit-single pastiche with BSA badges.

Honda's GB is more accomplished while SRX retros are infinitely more stylish, but some folk will pay chunky

SOLD AS SEEN

KAWASAKI Z650C, 1980. Runner / rebuild or spares, bought intending to restore but requires complete rebuild. The bike has done 39000 but the motor only 11000km. Runs OK but in poor state of tune and I think the cam chain needs attention clatter on tickover. Anyone who likes a challenge will make this a nice bike. **SOLD FOR £1220**

money for the SR (prices shown).

Prices
low £1500 || high £3000

XS500
498cc ohc twin || 205kg || 45mpg || 48bhp || 100mph || 1971-78

INITIALLY APPEARED AS the TX with a round tank, became the XS and was killed off by Yamaha's coffin tank styling. Steering was adequate; stopping was actually good, but short-stroke engine needed to be revved and transmission was far from smooth. Never generated the same enthusiasm as Honda's 400/4, hence prices much lower today. Check that import duties are all paid if buying an American barn-find.

Prices
low £750 || high £2500

RD500LC
499cc two-stroke V4 || 205kg || 90bhp || 130mph || 1984-86

MASSIVELY HYPED RACER for the roads became a collector's item quite quickly, but the 350LC was always easier to ride fast away from a race track. Technically extremely tricksy so demands attention if you intend to use it. Japanese market RZV has lighter alloy frame and better chassis components but detuned engine.

Prices
low £6000 || high £10,000

SRX600
608cc ohc single || 150kg || 45bhp || 1985-97

TECHNICALLY TRICKSY DEVELOPMENT of the SR/XT range with four-valve head, balance shaft, posh carb, disc brakes all round. No electric start so many people opted for the XBR instead, but the Yam has the edge on weight, steering and styling. Later home-market versions used more civilised XT600E engine, swapped twin shocks for monoshocks and even added an electric start. Much more popular now than when new. 250s and 400s also in demand (check for transplanted engines from old XTs).

Prices
low £1250 || high £4000

XS1/2/650
654cc ohc twin || 200kg || 50mpg || 115mph || 50bhp || 1968-85

A PARALLEL TWIN for Britbike enthusiasts who couldn't cope with oil leaks any longer, the early kickstart-only, drum-brake models were blessed with robust motors and blighted by suspect handling (easily fixed with modern rubber and suspension tweaks). Electric start from 1972; steering sorted on the XS650, which arrived in 1975 and was heavier and slower but steered okay. Electronic ignition from 1980. Heaps of Special (custom) variants. Weird misfires often traced to charging circuit / battery. Early XS1 bikes are extremely pretty and fetch a pretty price, hence beware later 650s wearing 'tribute' paintwork.

Prices
low £1800 || high £6000

XJ650 TURBO
653cc turbo four || 235kg || 45mpg || 125mph || 90bhp || 1982-83

AN OFFSHOOT OF the 1980s XJ fours, which were worthy enough but far from exciting (even with some interesting styling, LCD display and the first anti-dive forks on the Seca 750). Yam's turbo bike uses carbs (unlike the other three which switched to fuel injection). Clutch couldn't quite cope with the modest power hike; performance overall was underwhelming. For reliability, choose the Honda turbo. For fun, go grab a Kawasaki. Which leaves the XJ parked up alongside Suzi's XN…

Prices
low £1000 || high £3500

XS750/850
826cc ohc triple || 238kg || 40mpg || 120mph || 80bhp || 1976-81

SIMPLY SUPERB SHAFT-DRIVE tourers once the early glitches were fixed: E-onwards 750s much improved over the initial edition. Oil-cooled 850 from 1980 is one of our secret star bikes: laid-back, torquey, smooth and mostly reliable. More character than a CB or a GS; less cash than any Zed. Midnight Special in black and gold has same value as standard 850 (prices shown). 750s worth around 15% less.

Prices
low £950 || high £2500

SOLD AS SEEN

SUZUKI TS 250A, 1977, 11k miles. UK model trail bike. Sympathetic cosmetic overhaul 9 years ago. New original front mudguard, chain and sprockets, tyres, Hagon shocks and a few cables fitted. New battery and fresh fuel and it started. MoT with no advisories. **SOLD FOR £2050**

TR1
981cc ohc V-twin || 220kg || 45mpg || 115mph || 70bhp || 1981-83

NOT TO BE confused with the 750 Virago-type cruiser, the TR1 was a Eurostyle streetbike which used its 75° V-twin lump as a stressed member of the chassis, vaguely like a Vincent. Comfortable and practical with tons of torque and a low c-of-g; even a fully-enclosed drive chain. One of life's unsung all-rounders. Known faults include the starter clutch and head gaskets on early editions. Rare, but worth pursuing.

Prices
low £950 || high £3500

XS1100
1102cc ohc four || 250kg || 40mpg || 130mph || 95bhp || 1978-82

GRUNTY BIG SHAFT-DRIVE tourer with monster roll-on midrange (foreshadowing the V-Max delights to come, and can be similarly wayward if too much throttle is applied in the twisties). Usefully manoeuvrable thanks to the low height of its sculpted saddle. Second gear can be weak so test ride advised. Holds its own against the CBX Thou and Z1300 at half the price.

Factory custom Midnight Special in black and gold is worth no more than a standard machine. Odd-looking full-faired Martini special edition is more practical on the long haul but less attractive from any angle, and enthusiasts pay big bucks for them (double prices shown).

Prices
low £1250 || high £3500

V-MAX
1198cc ohc V4 || 260kg || 40mpg || 150mph || 140bhp || 1985-

THE KING OF straightline insanity and the kind of bike you really should ride at least once before hanging up your boots. Avoid the emasculated restricted versions: this is one bike where unofficial imports are often more valuable than UK-spec machines. Massive fun and an impossibly impressive street presence. Test ride advised: V-Boost should snap your shoulders at 6000rpm; check shaft drive for clean power delivery as odd clonks indicate future expense. Starter motor has heavy life so must be checked with a fully-charged battery.

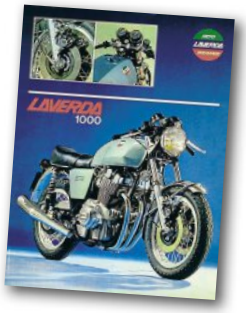
Prices
low £2500 || high £6000

E&OE

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

Italian three-step

Jota: A Spanish dance in triple time



WORDS & PHOTOS BY ROB DAVIES

Above: Three cylinders, two wheels, one word. That word is Jota

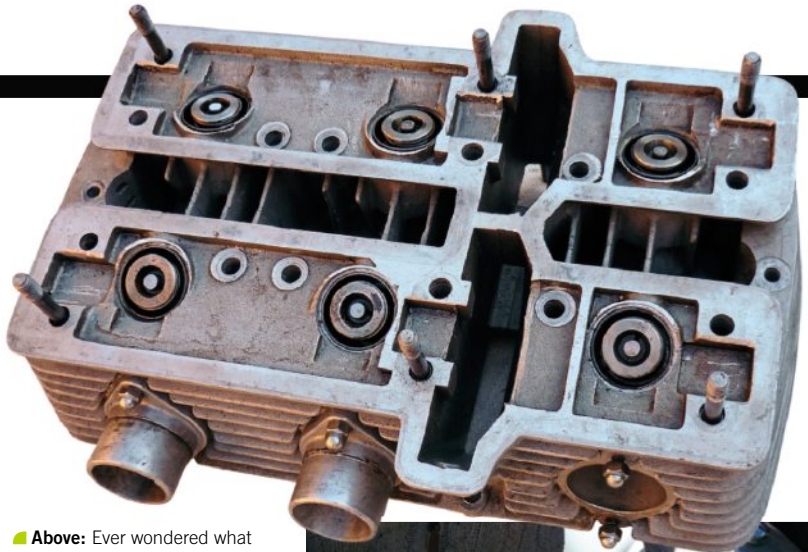
TAKE A LOOK at this well loved and maintained Jota, and remember that it's been owned by the same rider for over 40 years…

Laverda distributors have always been a bit thin on the ground, but my research tells me that it was our own British branch – Slater Brothers of Bromyard – who not only encouraged the production of this Italian stallion, but also gave it its name, so ten out of ten for British ideas. Laverda as a company produced agricultural vehicles, but there is absolutely nothing agricultural about the Jota.

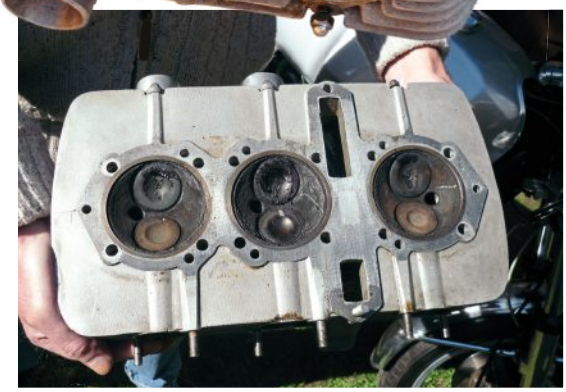
I picked up the well-thumbed and oiled Jota workshop manual with its lime green covers, looking for facts, facts, facts, as Dickens wrote in Hard Times, and found some very interesting sentences. I quote from under the heading: WHAT THIS BOOK WILL DO AND WHAT IT WON'T DO.

'As the title describes, this is a repair and tune up guide for the Laverda twin and triple motorcycles. The description 'guide' is chosen very carefully as it purports to be a guide only and will obviously not mend your machine by itself'.

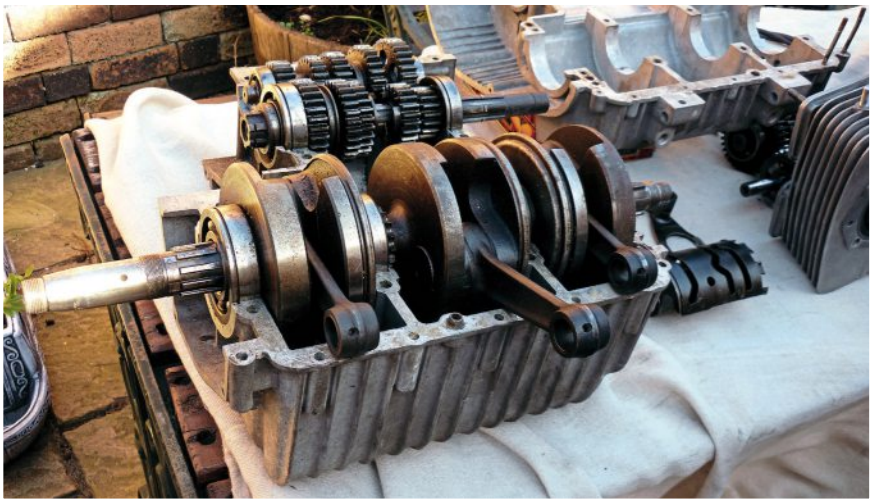
Well I'm amazed – you pay good money for a book and then have to do the work yourself – whatever



Above: Ever wondered what a dohc three-pot cylinder head looks like? The square and simply designed Jota head ready for overhaul



Right: Heavy carbon deposits on the exhaust valves, as you might expect after 25,000 miles



Below: The crank is one heavy piece of cast iron, but is well supported by large roller and ball main bearings. Gearbox has a conventional two-shaft layout

next? On the specification page I read: NOTE: Company policy decided that power outputs were not to be announced after 1974. From then on the answer will be 'enough.' So there you have it in black and white; when you purchase your Jota, you can be assured that there will be 'enough' power.

I prepared to take some photographs as the Jota glinted in the cold light of a spring afternoon. The owner of this particular Laverda loves his motorcycles, but this particular bike has a special place in his heart. He is – like many riders – only too pleased and enthusiastic to talk about his favourite bike, but prefers to stay totally in the background when it comes to any publicity. "The bike's the thing," he emphasised to me as we leaned meditatively against the garden shed to admire the sculpted two-wheeled object. And you have to agree that although this bike has had more than one makeover during its just over 40 year life and 55,000 miles of use, it has been beautifully maintained. Also, it has to be said, that the Jota – as far as I am concerned – has always been a rare beast, certainly when I was a youth in my part of the world. I wonder if that may have something to do with the original price?

Below: Everyone needs their manual. This one tells you that you have to do the work yourself. Whatever next?

But let's forget money for a moment. Let's imagine we can travel back in time to the 1970s to remember the bikes from our youth and just what was available in the shops. To discover just how much the Jota cost from new, what was its competition, and ask the simple question – if I had the money, what bike would I have chosen from this era?

Maybe you recall 1976 for the same reason I do; because that was the summer we thought would never end. The sun shone every day for about six weeks, while all the rivers and streams were quickly drying up – a great summer to buy and ride a bike. Not so good for cleaning it, as water for washing cars and bikes was banned at one point. So there you are in the decade of Abba and Saturday Night Fever; you're young, have money burning a hole in your pocket, plus you have just passed your test and sold that troublesome BSA C15 to the guy down the road.

Most importantly, you are itching to get your hands on your first BIG bike. You flick your fingers purposefully through the latest copy of your favourite motorcycling magazine looking for inspiration. What's out there?

Well, Honda are still offering their ultra-smooth and reliable CB750. This legendary machine has had good reviews for some years, but several of your mates already have one, and you have had a ride. The Suzuki 750 water-cooled 'Kettle' looks pretty fabulous, and goes like smoke. Trouble is it leaves a pall of fine blue smoke in its wake, and they – whoever 'they' are – say it doesn't handle very well around bends. Then there are the Brit twins, but you have already had a ride on several of these, plus the oil leaks all over the garage floor, and besides, you want something different, something that will stand out from the common herd of Beezas, Bonnies and Nortons.

You turn more pages and come across a sales ad for the new Moto Guzzi Le Mans 850, another twin, but if you drop that on a bend, one of those cylinder heads is sure to go. On the next page is a glossy green and chrome Kawasaki Z900, now hailed as the king of the two-wheel beasts, and your lustful eyes linger over the specifications: 82bhp and a top speed of 132mph. You chew it over and imagine yourself sitting on that seat and twisting that throttle.

And then… on the opposite page is a bike you have never seen before – you've only heard the whispers. It is the 1000cc (almost) Laverda Jota, and it has been clocked at over 140mph – the fastest stock bike on the planet. You can almost feel the crumpled fivers passing from your hands into the sweaty palms of the patient Laverda salesman, and half an hour or so later riding the orange beast out of the showroom (they were nearly all orange, of course). There is a snag of course, there always is, the Jota at £2000 is nearly 50% more than the big Kawasaki. But what the heck, you have the money.

The present owner purchased his Series 1 Jota from a shop in Birmingham in 1978. It was 18 months old, had 1800 miles on the odo, and cost £1700 second-hand. He had a Ducati to start with, but fell in love with the Jota after a demo ride at Kings Superbike Centre in Birmingham. Now you could buy half a house for £1700 in 1978, not that you would buy half a house of course, but you do get my meaning.

He has an enviable collection of motorcycles, but after 40 years insists that if he could only keep one, the Laverda would be it. And if it was stolen? Well that's a horror story not worth thinking about. I asked about maintenance:

Above: There's nothing miraculous or original about the Jota's frame. Here it is, after painting and with the rear shocks fitted

1: Fitting the pistons back into the barrels is surprisingly simple, and Triumph Trident owners will observe that the long studs make holding the block in the correct orientation pretty easy

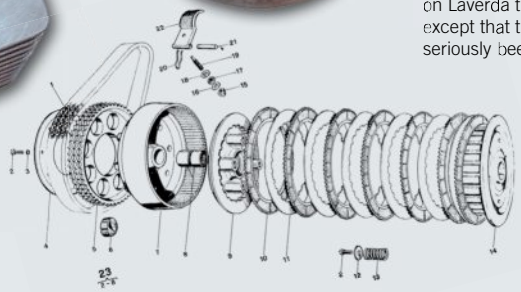
2: Designed in an age when 'compact' was not a problem, the Jota's cambox seems oddly roomy, thanks to its two-valve layout

3: Although the engine unit is no lightweight, there's plenty of room to manhandle it back into the frame

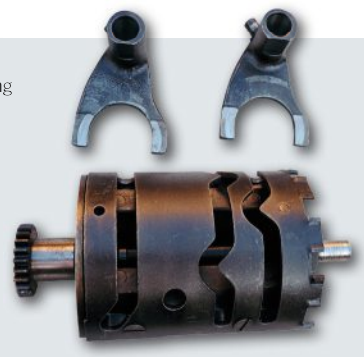
"The bike had done 1800 miles when I bought it – not a lot, but now it has 55,000 on the clock. At first I used to take it back to the shop, but as the years go by and I took other bikes apart, I slowly got the confidence to start working on the Laverda. Over the last 38 years I have stripped it on more than one occasion.

"The Laverda Club is useful for advice, but Richard Slater of Collington, Bromyard is the usual place for parts and information, though sometimes you have to do a bit of research and go elsewhere. For instance, a few years back the engine was smoking a little, so I did an engine strip and decided that the barrels needed new linings – they are cast iron liners in an aluminium outer. The pistons were still OK so I simply fitted new rings; two compression and a scraper made of three parts. New liners were unavailable, so I went online and found just a few miles away in Wolverhampton a company called Laystall

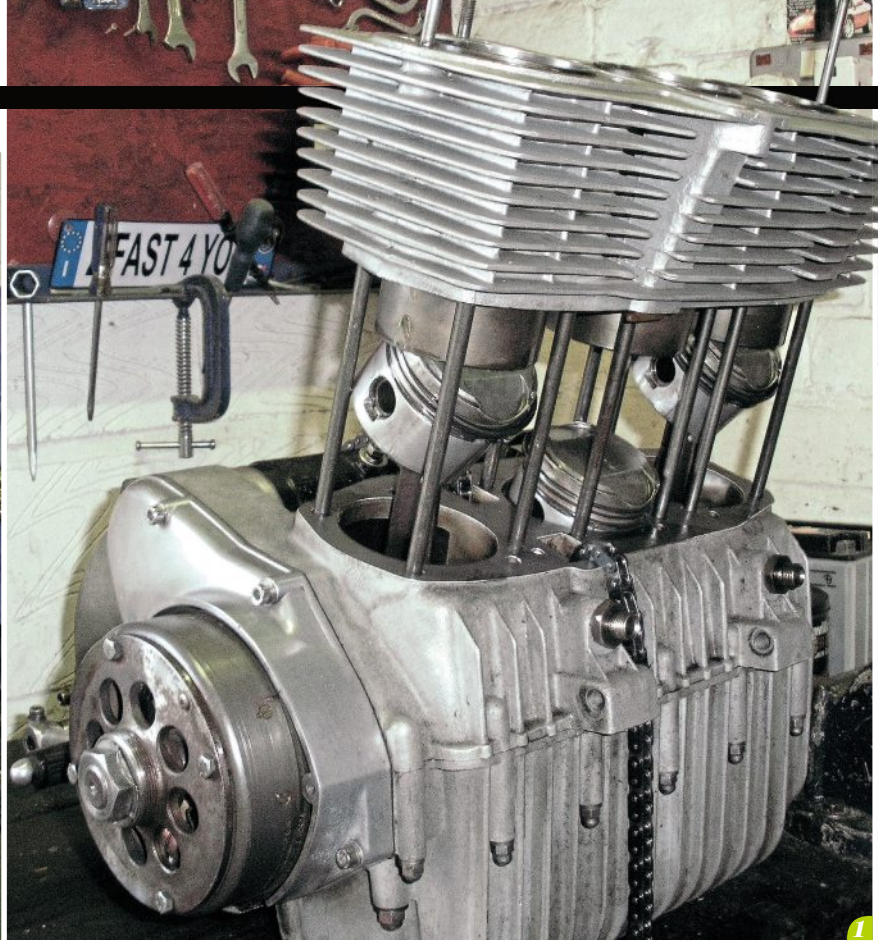
Aluminium barrels with cast iron liners. The liners were removed and replated



Left: There's nothing particularly unusual about the clutches on Laverda triples, except that they are seriously beefy



Nothing connected to a Laverda triple is delicate, even the gear selector mechanism! Observe the selectors and selector drum



Engineering that would make new liners using the old ones as a pattern. They made three to standard dimensions for £200; not a bad deal. So the barrels went in the oven to 300 degrees, and I tapped them out ready to fit the new ones.

"As for the rest of the engine, well it's the same clutch and gearbox, though the bike has had a few paint jobs over the years just to keep it looking right. To make it my own, I did have the swinging arm, headlight bucket and engine plates chromed, and a few years back the frame was powder coated at Planet in nearby Aldridge. I made a stainless steel chainguard for it, and in the 1980s I did have it in all black livery, but more recently, I had it sprayed back to its original silver colour scheme.

"Back in the 1980s I did experiment with a different cylinder head which had larger valves and bored inlet tracts. I also fitted 36mm carbs instead of the standard 32mm. There was a bit more power, but I reverted back to standard specification after a while as it wasn't that much of an improvement.

4: The three carbs, now fitted to the engine and wearing their air box

5: The owner has done a few subtle mods like chroming the engine plates and having stainless and polished bolts throughout

6: Dellorto 32mm carbs, as fitted to several Italian bikes. These give a spray of fuel every time you operate the throttle, so it's a good idea not to let admirers sit there twisting the grip with the engine off

7: The angled bars give the Jota a very café racer feel, while the gentle wear on the rims of the clocks shows that this bike has been maintained and not restored

The heart of the beast contains three pistons, conventional enough with two compression rings and an oil scraper

In the summer of 2008 I went to Breganze in Italy on a road trip which included a Laverda Rally. Breganze is where they make the bikes, by the way. It's a beautiful area north west of Venice, and is known for its wines, so that's two reasons for going already.

"I had the good fortune to meet several Laverda owners. You know how it is when you get to talking to other like-minded owners, and one of the guys asked if I was going to take my bike to the 60th anniversary the very next year. I didn't fancy doing the whole 1100 mile journey on the bike, so I transported it there in the van; and then rode the Jota around the Breganze area, meeting other Jota owners, and we had a wonderful time.

"The Jota is a great bike to own and ride, but it does have its little imperfections. The engine is thirsty and the tank is not huge, so regular fill-ups are obligatory. The clutch can be a bit hard, especially if you are riding around town, and the handling isn't perfect. Nevertheless, when others ask me which bike I would choose if I had all the bikes in the world in front of me, I have to say it would be the Jota every time; I can't be more honest than that, can I? CBG

1: The racy lines of the Jota are clearly seen from this angle, while stainless – not original – exhausts prevent any more rotting through from condensation traps toward the end. Exhausts and downpipes made by Keihan in Redditch

2: Twin front discs with the calipers at the front of the lower fork leg, as with early Z1 Kawasakis. You need some stopping power with all that weight – 520 pounds wet

Below: Not all Jotas were orange, some silver ones escaped the factory too. Chromed headlight and swinging arm are custom mods. A chrome grab rail was an accessory, and here the owner has fitted his indicators to it as they look better, and don't foul the foot when getting on board

LAVERDA JOTA

ENGINE: air-cooled, six-valve DOHC transverse triple (firing at 180°, later models were to fire at 120°) **CAPACITY:** 981cc from 75x74mm **POWER:** 90bhp at 8000rpm. Some sources quote 85bhp at 7600rpm **WEIGHT:** 236kg (520lbs) wet **BRAKES:** Twin disc front, single disc rear **TOP SPEED:** 140mph

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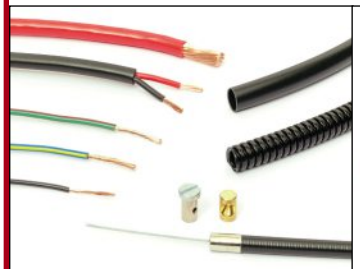

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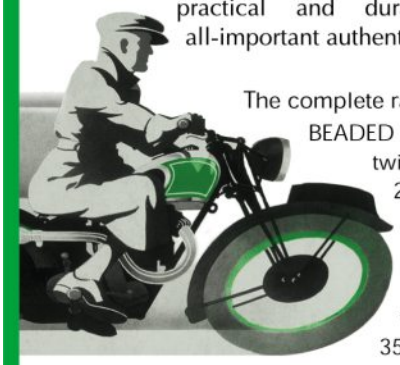

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Lining a fuel tank

Sometimes there's no choice but to line a petrol tank. The trick is to do it properly

WORDS & PHOTOS BY STEVE COOPER

DR JOHNSON IS said to have opined that 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel!' If you've ever had to endure a poorly repaired motorcycle fuel tank you'll quite possibly have similar feelings about tank liners and the people who use them. Little is more soul destroying than rolling your bike out for a ride to see a blistered patch of paint and that tell-tale weeping brown stain that flags up a leak.

For a raft of reasons, tank liners seem to have an inherently bad name which, on the whole, is not really justified. Properly installed they can be a godsend; if a seam is leaking and a welded repair isn't viable then your potentially irreplaceable tank has just got another life. On the other hand if you perceive the installation of a tank liner as the obligatory 'quick fix', both you and your bike may very well be drinking in the last chance saloon! Know this – petrol doesn't need an open flame to ignite it; a hot exhaust pipe or cylinder head is more than up to the task of inciting a merry little blaze. With that in mind let's look at how we might go about applying a liner to a particularly rare Honda TLM200 tank

Above: Two more tanks potentially in need of lining

Choosing a tank liner

Simply put, tank liners seem to come in two basic formats; either single or twin pack. There's no argument for or against either system, what's more important is how good they are and what substrates they will work on. Some types will only adhere to steel and are not viable for aluminium, glass fibre or plastic tanks. Use the wrong one and it could all end in tears.

Forums are often a good place to get opinions, but arguably not when it comes to tank liners. Even the best material will fail if it's not installed properly. Read the manufacturers' websites and ask questions if necessary. Some suppliers will offer technical support and advice. But remember one thing – once inside a petrol tank, a liner, whether it's installed correctly or not, will be a total pig to remove!

Preparation

For exactly the same reasons you wouldn't expect a sill on a 1970s Ford Capri bodged with glass fibre to pass an MoT, or last more than a few months, you really don't want to apply a liner over rust. Claims that tanks so lined won't rust is piffle; they'll simply rust through more slowly. Sealed behind a resin liner the rust will still nibble away but not as fast as it might otherwise do.

Everyone seems to have their own take on tank rust removal so we'll skip over that and simply say a tank due to be lined must be both devoid of rust and free from any petrol residue. Most reputable suppliers of tank liners will include methods of pre-treatment, etc. Assuming all of this is in place, tape over any known leaks with quality masking tape so that the liner doesn't damage any existing paintwork.

With our tank the owner has already cleaned it out and reinforced some of the lower portions with plastic metal where the tank is known to be especially thin. From here the tank is wrapped in a double layer of newspaper held in place with more masking tape before being enshrouded with industrial wrapping. Domestic food wrap is also viable but is often less resistant to the chemicals used. It pays to ensure the neck of the tank is well protected because any cured liner may latterly precipitate cap sealing issues.

Lastly and most importantly don't forget to seal the tap outlet(s). Some suppliers recommend using tape but first-hand experience suggests this could all end in tears if it inadvertently lifts off. A more permanent barrier such as a cork or drilled metal plate with bolts makes for a much better seal. ❧

Below: Gloves, paper, tape, thinners – all needed

Right: The internal surfaces need to be totally free of any contamination

Left: All external repairs need to be in place before fitting a tank liner

1: Mask off external surfaces, tank liners stick like the proverbial

2: Mask carefully here to prevent liner sticking where it shouldn't

3: External threads carefully masked and a decent, secure, bung inserted

Right: A second line of defence and one that most tank liners struggle to penetrate

1

Mixing, operating conditions and additives

As the saying goes – RTFM or Read The Flaming Manual. According to the people who sell these materials more tank liners fail due to 'operator error' than any other single factor. One difference between single and twin pack liners is that the latter needs precise mixing; a similarity is that whatever product you select it will need mixing to ensure it's 100% homogenous. Single part tank liners can be prone to separation when left on a shelf.

To ensure you get the full benefit of the product you'll need to drag up whatever is on the bottom of the can and get it evenly distributed throughout the carrier medium. If this vital step is ignored, your tank will not get the protection the liner can afford it.

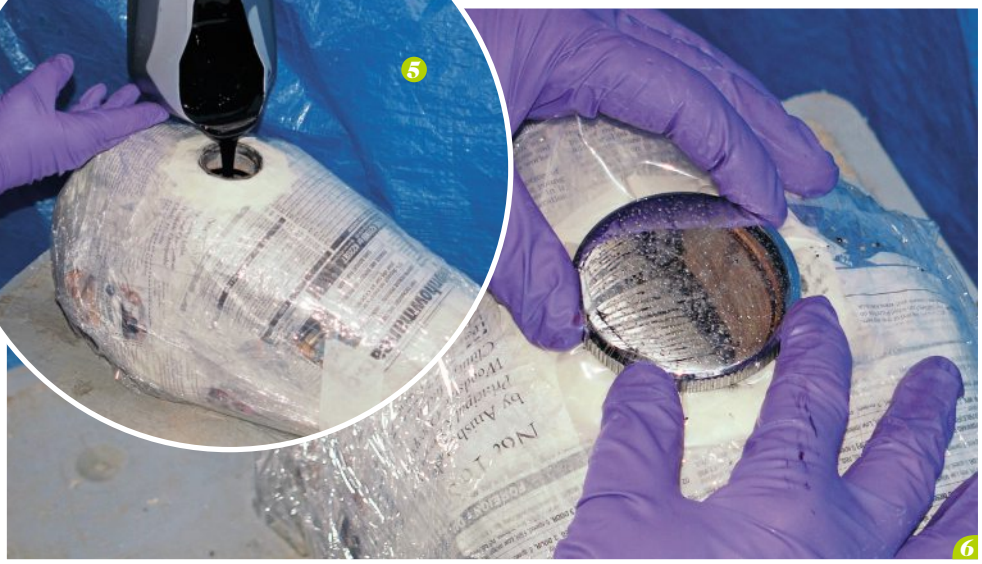
- **1:** Know how it works, how to mix and how to apply – RTFM, etc
- **2:** Empty the can completely into a clean mixing pot
- **3:** Make sure this pot is as empty as possible; this is the curing agent
- **4:** Mix carefully and thoroughly but don't stir in too much air

Two pack products normally come in premeasured quantities that will give the best possible reaction when the resin and hardener interact. Overdose the resin with hardener and the working or pot life of the tank liner will be greatly reduced, use insufficient harder and resin system may never fully cure. When it comes to mixing, slow and long not short and strong is the mantra to chant. The more air you whisk into a tank liner the less effective it will be. The stirred liner may need a few minutes to deaerate but if you've whipped it up to a mousse consistency with an electric drill chances are it'll cure before you can ever use it.

Most instructions will advise on operating conditions; ignore these at your peril. If the ambient temperature is too cold the liner will be unlikely to flow adequately enough to cover all the faces of your tank. Work above the specified temperature and the liner may very well start to set before you've completed the task in hand. This is a particular issue with two pack liners where an increase in temperature can dramatically accelerate the curing or reaction time. If necessary heat the garage or workshop and ensure it, the tank and the chosen product are all at the same temperature. Although not normally an issue in the UK, if you're doing this at the height of the summer chose a cool garage or similar and avoid working in direct sunlight.

Some materials can be pre-thinned if you find you have no choice but to work at low temperatures. The preferred solvent will normally be specified within the instructions supplied, but if a solvent isn't mentioned assume thinning is not an option.

Finally, a little dollop of nanny state H&S. Most of the products available and all of the solvents you might be using are hazardous to some degree. Wear gloves when handling the liners, avoid naked flames or incandescent heaters when using the liner or thinners and ensure adequate ventilation. The final point is rather important if you don't want to be zonked out!



- **5:** Aim the liner over both sides of the tank's internal saddle
- **6:** Kind of obvious, but you'll only forget the filler cap just the once!
- **7:** Run the liner to the back end…
- **8:** …and now to the front…
- **9:** …shake it to the right…
- **10:** …shake it to the left…
- **11:** …and don't forget the top

Application

Irrespective of the tank's actual shape, think of it as a cube with six internal faces, each of which must receive a good coating of your chosen tank liner. Following the instructions, pour the liner into the tank carefully. A tip here… the saddle of the tank that goes over the frame rail(s) is often the hardest part to properly coat. If you can target the initial pour to cover as much of this as possible it'll be one thing less to worry about later.

With the liner now in the tank, fit the lid or a suitable bung but ensure whatever you use is protected by a sheet or two of thin polythene. It makes cleaning up much easier and no one wants tank liner inside the springs, seal and breather aperture of a filler cap.

If the tank liner you've selected is decently liquid then you have a slightly easier task. It should be possible to effectively shake the liner over every internal surface fairly quickly. However, if you've selected a more viscous material, then you will have to work at its speed and persuade it to gradually run over each surface in turn. Coming back to our cube analogy, rest the tank on each face and, if said faces are noticeably curved gently rock the tank in an arc so that all curved faces of 'the cube' are liberally covered.

Working methodically it should be possible to treat each of the six faces in turn, but as the coating gradually attaches itself to the tank's inner walls obviously there'll be less freely available. Therefore allow the remaining liner to pool in one area and then persuade it to flow onto the next and so on.

You'd really have to try hard not to be able to apply one of the more liquid liners, but the more viscous types do take a little more time and patience. Note: neither is necessarily better than the other; sloppy liners are great for ease of application and where seams may be split. Thicker liners merit a more studious approach but are arguably much better suited where metal has thinned and or there are multiple pin holes.

Draining off and cleaning up

Almost without exception you'll need to drain off the unused liner. All instructions will tell you to ensure you don't allow the residual liner to pool in any one place, but ultimately you won't be able to keep rotating the tank for several hours. Many tanks have a baffle tube in the tank's neck, making the draining off via the largest orifice nigh on impossible. Use the tap hole(s) and wait until there are only drips running out, not a constant stream. Now invert the tank and move what's not coming out around again. This will hopefully use up any liner that's left. Remove the bung or cap and wipe clean the area where the filler cap's gasket sits. This area should be bare steel/aluminium/plastic with no residual liner whatsoever. Paint thinners normally come in handy here but again use the solvent specified if one is given.

Now walk away and let the chemistry do its job. The ideal orientation of the tank is probably the one that allows any minuscule residual liner to pool in the most badly affected area. A word of warning – don't allow liner to cure on external fuel tap spigot threads or totally block any internal threads as it can be pure hell to remove when cured.

Curing and cleaning

Once again RTFM and follow the instructions to the letter. Some liners require air to be blown through the tank to drive off solvent. The instructions often suggest a compressed air supply but a constantly running compressor can irritate the best of neighbours! Practical experience has shown that a small pump as used to inflate air beds and the like works just fine.

Warmth accelerates the curing process but again be wary of heat with solvent based liners. Once the liner has begun to go off (check how tacky the drain-off can is) remove the plastic wrap, newspaper and any seam sealing masking tape then check whether any liner leaked out onto the tank. Again, using solvent before the liner fully cures should sort out any issues. Once fully cured or dry, check the tap hole fitting is free of liner. Internal threads are best cleaned out with a screw tap with a vacuum cleaner to suck up any extraneous swarf before it falls in the tank. CBG

1: Move the tank around to get all residual liner to the tap hole

2: Before the liner cures clean the outer filler neck surfaces

3: Tap hole needs to be free of liner obstruction, tap threads need to be clean

4: The miracles of science have delivered a smooth liner resistant to the excesses of modern unleaded fuels

Tank liner removal

There are essentially only three ways of effectively removing tank liner. It's possible, although not favoured, to ask your local plater to wire up your fuel tank in his chrome plating tank; chromic acid will digest most organic materials. The second option is to burn the liner out courtesy of a bonfire but please ensure the tank is totally devoid of fuel and vapours before attempting this – for obvious reasons. The third option uses the active ingredient from old fashioned paint stripper. Methylene chloride makes easy work of most old tank liners.

The eagle-eyed reader will have noted that all of the above will have serious, deleterious, impacts upon the paint finish but there may be one, less aggressive, option. If the liner is over five years old there's a good chance it may not be resistant to modern unleaded petrol. Half a tank of supermarket petrol might very nicely loosen that old liner.

Reasons for liner failure

In no particular order, causes for liner failure are:

- Old liner with modern petrol
- Poorly installed liner
- Liner applied over rust or petrol residues
- Liner applied to only part of the tank
- Wrong liner for type of tank
- One liner kit stretched over two tanks

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Buying abroad

If you can't find the classic bike of your dreams in the UK, then now's the time to go global

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME **PHOTOS BY** OLIVER HULME, CHRIS DICKINSON AND MORTONS ARCHIVE

HUNTING FOR A CLASSIC motorcycle is as much part of the ownership experience as actually running one. But while shed collections grow, fewer are offered for sale, and many which do come onto the UK market are either restored to within an inch of their lives or have every component worn out.

As the finite number of available runners goes down, and every barn in the UK is scoured for a decent example to restore and ride, many people try the import route. Picking up a bike from less inclement foreign climes can be an attractive option. Bikes may be stashed away in storage when the owner moves on to other things, rather than sold. This is especially common in the USA. When the latest shiny thing is acquired then the old slogger, largely worthless, is consigned to a dust sheet. A lack of rain, sleet and salt in some states means these machines have survived largely intact.

While the US is the source for much of this aged metalware, bikes are also being picked up in Europe, although countries with strong economies like Germany tend to be out of the running. Some specialist dealers still pick up machines from Japan, but the number of 'grey' import, hot Japanese

Top: Sometimes you have to wonder if it was really worth shipping a bike halfway around the world. Ballast, maybe?

Right: Fresh off the boat and ripe for restoration

Left: Last on the road in 1982, in sunny California. 'May need some recommissioning' indeed, but at least it shouldn't be too rusty

middleweights has dropped dramatically since the late 1980s and early 1990s, reflecting the rise of the Japanese yen against the pound. Grey importing had a marked effect on the UK market – it was so popular it even had its own magazine. Suzuki's now ubiquitous Bandit sparked interest when British riders adopted the home-market 400, so Suzuki started bringing in the 600 and 1200s that now seem to be everywhere.

So how do you acquire and return an old BSA to the land of its birth, or bring in an item of Japanese exotica rarely seen on British roads? Dealers sourcing bikes from the US bring them in by the container load, often sight unseen, which are bought in from trusted suppliers across the pond. This means there's plenty to choose from, whether they be sparkling, rarely used examples or dust-caked garage and yard relics. At the top end of the scale are those importers who specialise in shining examples of the best in two-wheeled transport, while other traders ship in individual bikes or buy handfuls of relics out of containers. Alternatively you could do it all yourself – here are some of the pros, cons and pitfalls you might encounter en route…

1

2

3

FINDING THE RIGHT BIKE

IT'S RARE TO FIND a dealership that will sell UK registered bikes they have brought in themselves. James Sherlock in Devon do register some of the bikes they bring in from Japan, mostly BMWs, particularly those machines that will go through an MoT with little work. James advises anyone bringing in a bike to watch out for poisonous spiders(!). He also recommends getting a very careful look at any pictures before settling on a deal. Japan's 1980s consumer boom saw lots of previously poor rural dwellers getting jobs in the cities and with the money they suddenly earned they bought whatever they liked.

"If they fancied a motorbike, they just bought one. Often they'll have just ridden around on it for a few thousand miles and parked it up, and they've been sitting there for 30 years." The long lay-up means the bikes aren't worn out but can result in blocked carbs, seized brakes, dried out bearings and all kinds of other problems. Provenance and documentation for a Japanese-sourced bike can be hard to decipher, unless you can read kanji.

You can buy imported classics without registration documents from a number of dealers in the UK or at autojumbles, and some sellers are better than others at sorting out the paperwork. Very few will actually register the bikes. With containers of 40 or more coming in and the need to clear them out for new stock fairly quickly, the rigmarole of registering them isn't worth their time and effort. A good dealer will make sure all the paperwork is in order, including the all-important NOVA.

Classic Bike Imports bring in container loads of up to 60 bikes at a time, usually inspected and personally selected by them in the US, often with boxes of spares to fill the gaps in the container. Some are immaculate and require little work to be made ready, while others are cheaper projects. As well as the US, bikes come from Canada and from EU countries, where the importing arrangements are not only currently less complicated but cheaper too. Bikes are sourced in Denmark, Italy and in particular Spain, which has the advantage of being a country with a warm, dry climate and of having a weaker economy, making the bikes cheaper to acquire.

Unregistered bikes from Classic Motorcycle Imports come with a written guide explaining how to get a numberplate for your new bike. Justin Dawkins from CBI says that the current buying trend is for low mileage Japanese classics from the 1970s, rather than British models.

1: Classic Motorcycle Imports have this promising Kawasaki on offer

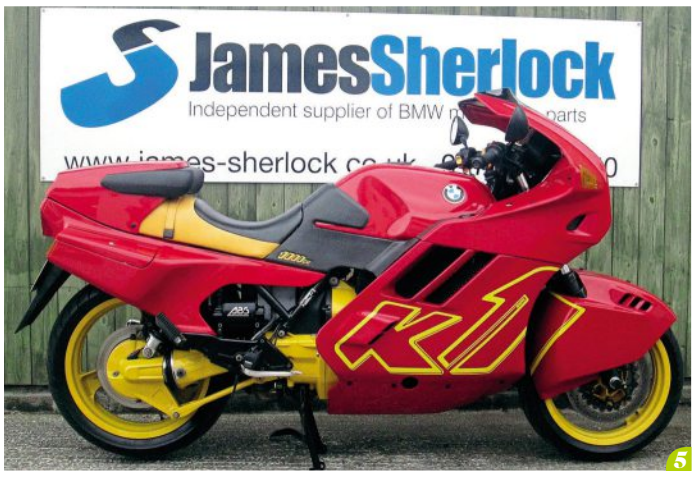
2: Burton Bike Bits recently brought a container of 'barn find' bikes back from the USA

3: This 1974 Triumph T150 Trident comes with its all-important NOVA paperwork and is available from Burton Bike Bits at £4000

4: Just back from the USA, a unique interpretation of the 1962 Norton Navigator 350 twin. Comes with its exhaust system and matching panniers for £2750

5: James Sherlock have done all the hard work for you with this 1990 BMW K1. It was imported from Japan and has been UK registered so is ready to roll without any paperwork hassles – which is why it's up for £5k

4



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GOING IT ALONE

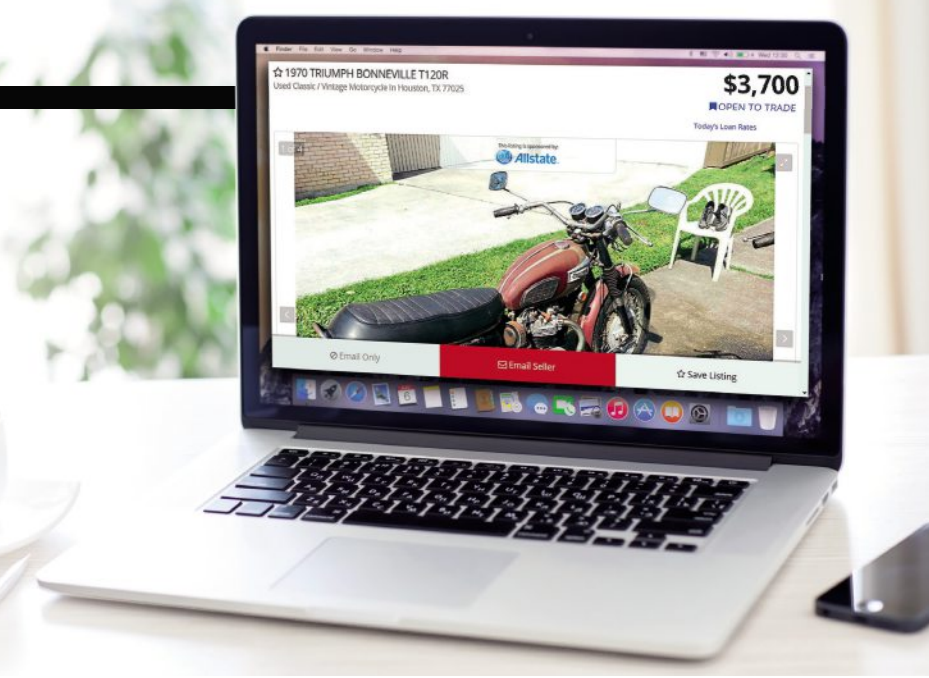
TRADERS WHO SPECIALISE in importing old bikes, like Justin at CBI, suggest that bringing in a single machine is rarely worth the cost and hassle unless it is a very specific rare model, something with personal significance, such as a bike owned by a family member, or 'unless it's free.' But if you fancy doing it yourself, finding a bike in the US on eBay, Gumtree, Cycle Trader or Craigslist is the easy bit and is just the start. The bike will need to be collected and shipped cross country to a port, consigned to a container with other bikes, bags of noodles, cuddly toys or machine parts, packed in and shipped to a UK dock.

Prices for British machines in the US are, as a rule of thumb, the same sort of price in dollars as they are in pounds in the UK. A tired but allegedly running 1970 Triumph T120R might seem a desirable project and was on offer in Houston, Texas, through the Cycle Trader website for $3700 (c£2800 at current exchange rates). If it was in the UK it would certainly be snapped up at that price. But add up to £1000 in shipping costs, the risk that what you see might not be what you get, possible damage on the high seas, VAT and import duties, then things look less rosy.

If you do choose to bring a bike to the UK from the USA then there are several companies which offer shipping services. If possible, get a personal recommendation rather than relying on an internet search. One such search revealed a US-based company that could transport the Triumph T120R to Southampton from Houston, Texas in a shared container for $915.

A better option could be using a UK-based importer. Shippio specialise in this kind of service and import a large number of motorcycles from the USA to the UK. As well as moving competition bikes around and taking British machines across the Atlantic to the US for tourists to ride, Shippio also attend the annual Las Vegas auctions – where almost 2000 classic motorcycles go under the hammer – for European customers. Giles Ernsting from Shippio says they also move bikes bought privately, to the UK. So far, only one of their customers had any issues with an import, and that was because the buyer didn't check the registration document properly.

Shippio will arrange for the bike to be collected, packed if required and added to a sea container. They can arrange airfreighting, but that is likely to be prohibitively expensive for most buyers of ordinary imports. Shippio will check that all the documentation is correct for you. Giles says that the vast majority of imports are old British bikes and Japanese classics, with a few Harley-Davidsons. Their charge to bring a bike from Houston would be around £700, plus 20% VAT and any duty payable.



Top: Bikes like this look tempting when you find them online, but it'll cost at least another grand on top of the purchase price to get it delivered to your door

Above: Shippio send cars and bikes – including steeds like this competition Metissé – all over the world

Below: A Daytona comes back from across the pond

THE PAPERWORK

YOU MIGHT BUY an import which has already been registered with DVLA and comes with a V5C, but you'll pay a price premium if someone else has plodded through the paperwork for you. Otherwise, no matter where you source your imported steed, the red tape is all yours. There's a lot of it to navigate, and while the forms are fairly straightforward it will be a time-consuming process. Online access is key, so the first thing you'll need is a Government Gateway account, which takes a couple of weeks to successfully set up.

If you started from scratch and are importing something yourself, you are going to need documents from the country of origin. In the US this is known as a Title. Until two years ago it was possible to import a bike without that document, but now the US customs service, a tricky organisation to deal with at the best of times, insist that any bike being sent abroad has to have a title. This can cause you problems if the machine turns up without one or if it is mislaid. On the other hand, that title will make it easier to actually register the machine in the UK as there will be some history with it.

When the bike arrives on these shores you'll need a document known as a NOVA or Notification Of Vehicle Arrivals certificate from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. If you do this privately you need to start the process of getting one of these within 14 days. HMRC will eventually tell you what duty and VAT are due based on your original purchase price and the cost of shipping it. Motorcycles over 30 years old are exempt from import duty; VAT on a bike is 5%. Bikes imported from EU, at least while we are still in it, are exempt from VAT. If you are importing from the EU, you can apply for the NOVA online, otherwise you tell HMRC by filling in customs forms when your vehicle enters the UK.

Get the forms from your shipping company or customs officers at the UK border. They'll ask to see any foreign registration for your vehicle or other documents you have for it. This could include Vehicle Identification Number, vehicle details, make and model; the vehicle registration details and the date it arrived in the UK; a purchase invoice or vehicle registration details, the price paid or the mileage. If you don't tell HMRC what you have done, they could fine you £5 a day. This is why it's so important to make sure your bike has its NOVA paperwork if you buy it from a dealer. No NOVA is a definite no-no if the machine doesn't have a V5C and a UK registration.

Once you have your NOVA, the next thing to do is get the beast dated. The registration document or title should help to do this, and it might satisfy the DVLA, but then again it might not. Paying an owners' club for this service may be the most straightforward method: a dating certificate will be cheaper if you join at the same time. You can Google for frame and engine numbers of popular models and marques to give you a rough idea of whether what you are looking at is how it came out of the factory, but this is hardly reliable. The oft-quoted theory of 'matching numbers' doesn't apply to many British bikes, so don't expect the frame and engine numbers to be identical. After 30 or 40 years engine swaps can be fairly common. It's the frame you need to worry about most of all.

Different dating services have different requirements. The VMCC and BSA clubs, for example, will want a sheaf of photographs of the bike from all angles, shots of the frame and engine numbers and ideally rubbings of the same as well as copies of any original documents. If they are happy with your documentation or pictures they'll send you a dating certificate. If they aren't happy, the BSAOC might ask a club member to help identify the bike for a fee. You'll either have to take it to a club night, or they might be able to arrange for an expert member to come to you. Almost all marque and specific model clubs offer a dating service – but you need to check that the club is accredited with the DVLA.

The re-emergence of several old marques with new owners has caused a few issues. The DVLA did briefly ask people who wanted to reregister old Meriden Triumphs to approach the Hinckley factory for records, but were quickly advised that this wasn't going to happen. The same thing occurred when Norton went through multiple ownerships, likewise with Royal Enfield, so watch out for the same thing to happen to those who want to register New Imperials, Francis-Barnetts and Dots. Mahindra's purchase of BSA might ruffle some feathers too.

Once upon a time every bike imported in this way had to go to the local licensing office for inspection. These days the service has been outsourced and around one in every 200 bikes is selected by the DVLA for inspection by one of their officers, completely at random.

Once you have your NOVA and your dating certificate, what next? You need a registration document, so apply to the DVLA for a V55/5

Above left: A typical bundle of paperwork required by a DVLA-approved owners' club to facilitate machine dating, which is a requirement for vehicle registration

registration pack. While you wait for this to arrive – it could take about ten days – start twirling the spanners. To get the registration document, your bike is going to need an MoT, which is issued based on the frame number. The registration pack contains three sheets of 55 questions to answer, but not all of these apply to classic motorcycles. Once the bike is successfully MoT'd you send the V55/5 form, HMRC's NOVA confirmation letter, the club dating letter, the MoT certificate, a copy of your passport or driving licence, two utility or council tax bills in your name, photos of each side of the bike and pictures of the frame and engine numbers and a fee, currently £55. You'll also have to stump up for road fund licence at some point: historic vehicles made more than 40 years ago are free, but paperwork for newer bikes will need to be accompanied by the appropriate road-tax fee.

The DVLA don't ask for insurance documents and say they don't check to see if you have insurance, except in the case of bikes to be registered in Northern Ireland where they ask for proof of insurance. Given the cost of insuring a classic bike can be pretty small these days, it's worth insuring it using the frame or engine number. It's an offence to keep a vehicle on the public road with road tax but without insurance, even if you don't ride it. If pennies are the issue and you don't intend to use the bike on the road straight away there is nothing to stop you taxing the bike to register it, then declaring it SORN as soon as you have the registration document.

Above: If you take on registering an import with DVLA yourself, then be prepared to spend several long days up to your neck in paperwork

Although there's a note on the top of the V55/5 which says 'incomplete forms will be rejected' this doesn't mean every single box is relevant to your bike. So which boxes do you fill in? There are three pages of notes, and 55 categories, but typically only 18 need to be filled out for a classic motorcycle. Be very careful when you do this however, because you are dealing a with DVLA bureaucrats who won't know a Scott from a Scammell.

The next step is to sign and date the declaration and tick the boxes that apply for the documents you have included. Then go back to the checklist and make sure you have all the documents. Then send the whole lot to the DVLA. Sending by Special Delivery is a good idea, and send them at the beginning of the week. Sending documents to arrive on a Friday or Saturday may mean they won't be signed for and they have been known to go missing.

DVLA should return all the paperwork you sent with your form within three weeks, along with a letter confirming your new registration number. Then you can get a numberplate and you are ready for the road.

CAUTIONARY TALES

AS THIS ISSUE goes to press, we are in the middle of buying an import. Spotted at the VMCC autojumble in Shepton Mallet, this BSA B25 Street Scrambler is up for sale from a private seller for a reasonable £1550. BSA unit singles are reasonably well-catered for by the spares industry, and are generally considered a good starting point for British classic bike ownership. Currently unregistered, the B25 was brought into the UK by an Exeter-based importer, although it is unclear when it arrived or where from. The current owner is a big fan of BSA unit singles.

It's the pre oil-in-frame model and fitted with its original high level exhaust, cowhorn bars and the rather funky Catalina type tank. It looks as if it has a fairly low mileage, it runs well, and started second kick from cold. Apart from a noisy valve gear operation (they all do that sir, apparently), the engine sounds sweet and the cycle parts are in good condition. It has the late 1960s full width 2ls brake rather than the much-maligned conical hub.

All the electrics work, and apart from a non-functioning, non-original speedometer it looks as if there is nothing stopping it passing an MoT. The frame number matches the date for a 1969 model and doesn't appear to have been tampered with. The engine number doesn't match the frame number, but is correct for a 1969 B25S and it is the frame number that is all important. It's got a NOVA according to the seller but as yet that is unseen and the money won't change hands until the paperwork has arrived in the buyer's hot and sweaty paws. In the meantime the necessary paperwork and pictures have been sent off to the BSAOC dating service to make sure it is what it says it is.

And it pays to be cautious, even when importing a bike from not so far away. The well-preserved Honda CB750 shown below spent 40 years in Ireland before coming across the Irish Sea to England. After seeing it advertised in a magazine the current owner liked the look of the pictures and bought it sight unseen.

When it arrived he was pleased with what he got. But reregistering it was an awkward process. The Irish registration document said it was a blue 1974 K2, not a gold 1972 example. This was going to make it hard to register with an age-related plated – or worse, could he have been sold a stolen bike? The engine and frame numbers matched with the logbook.

The new owner contacted the Dublin dealers, who assured him that the bike was genuine and had been ridden round Dublin for 40 years. But to register it in the UK with the right plates would be hard. Months of back and forth communications followed. There were assurances of the bike's legality, a request to send the logbook back, claims that the Dublin registration office had moved causing the paperwork to be delayed and further complaints to the dealer's California head office.

Eventually the logbook came back. It was exactly the same logbook that had been sent with the bike originally. The only alteration was that the registration office had crossed out 'blue' and '1974' and written 'gold' and '1972' in biro. The DVLA was happy with this and granted it an age-related registration number… CBG

Above: A registered BSA B25SS would normally sell for over £2000; over £2500 if ready to ride. This unregistered import is up for £1550

Below: This was, according to the documents a blue 1974 Honda CB750. Could've been worse: we've seen a bike registered as a snowplough before now

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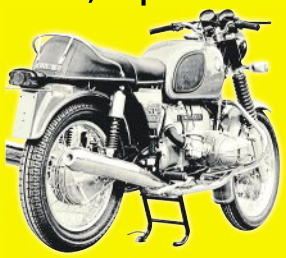

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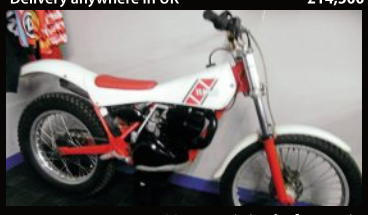

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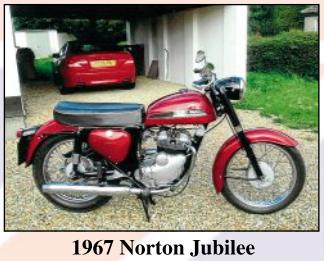

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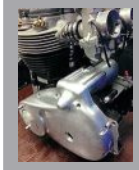

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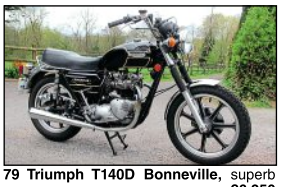

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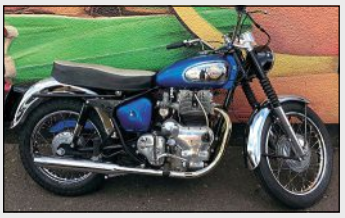

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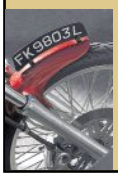

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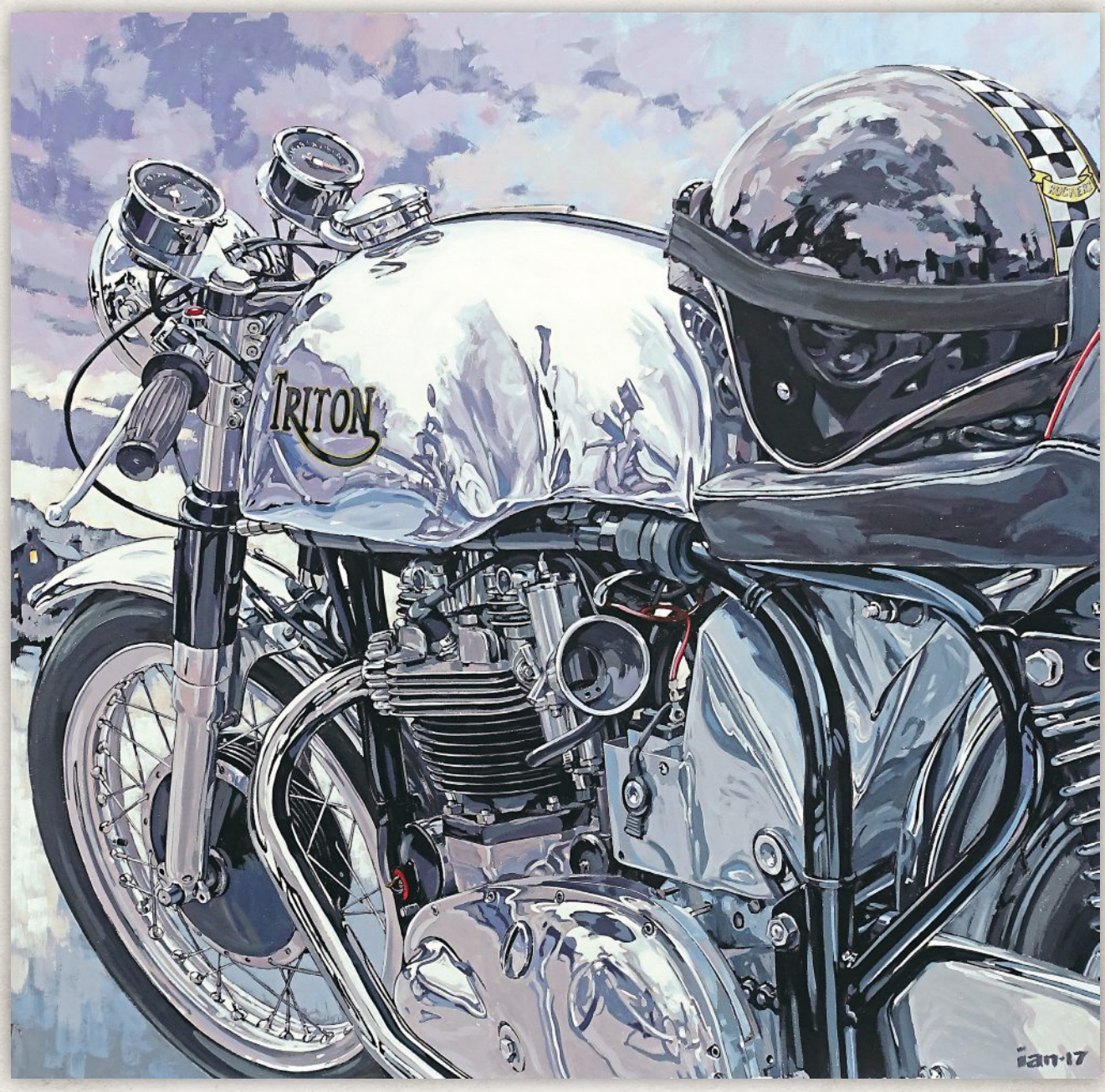

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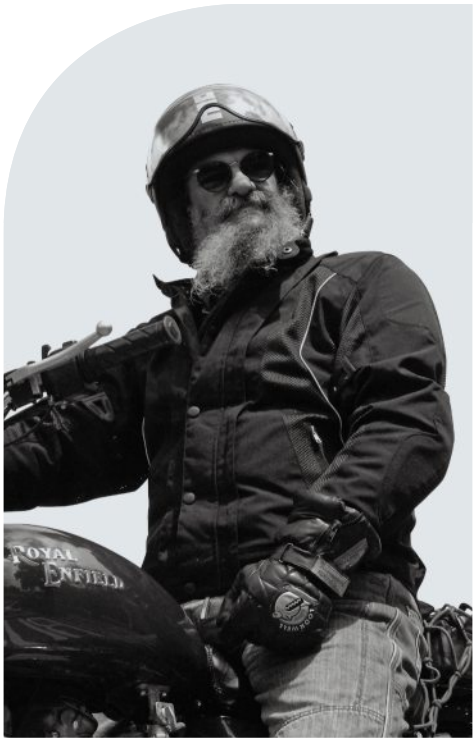

FRANK WESTWORTH

On ornithology

If at first you don't suck seed...

I AM A CONSIDERABLE fan of the blackbird. No no, not the Blackbird; that's a Honda and is far too fast for a dozy soul like me. The bird. The black one. Four and twenty of which were famously baked into a pie, for no reason obvious to anyone even slightly sane. Blackbirds are great. They sing great tunes, fab bonkers warblings that remind me of November 22, 1968 for some reason, and they look dead cool in their endless black. Birds in black. You could make a movie about that.

The res, down here in the soothing, if salty, airs of Cornwall, supports a rousing population of blackbirds. This is a good thing; they're decorative and tuneful, a rare combination among the humans of my acquaintance. However – read this as you will – they can be utterly and completely bonkers. Deranged. Insane. Illogical. For example, every day, for several hours at a time, and several times in the same day, one of them, an otherwise handsome guy, all black threads and bright yellow beak, flies into the bathroom window. He can perform this seriously silly flying display with apparent mad delight for hours at a time. The entire house reverberates to the crash and clatter of his insanity. He launches from the top of the heating oil tank, crashes beak-first into the top of the window, falls in a feathered heap to the sill. Sits up, takes off, does it again. Repeat. It sounds like a one-bird tennis match. Strange but true.

Why does he do this? Many are the suggestions and supposed cures. No bird – not even a seriously dense bird trying his best to impress a mate by attacking a pane of glass – can mistake a pane of glass for another bird, a love rival, even a tasty worm. He can't actually enjoy it much. Like banging your head on a wall, it's only fun when it's over, and no even partially smart critter would go back to do this again. Madness.

I was considering the stupidity of bird-brained birds while stripping down a BSA front brake for maybe the tenth time. This is a fine example of the undoubted engineering excellence sometimes referred to by those with a clinical lack of imagination as the 'comical hub'. In fact, it's a very neat design, looks good, has very few moving parts and is simple and reliable in operation. The only fault is that this one doesn't work. Consistency is plainly a secondary issue, as I have another bike – a Triumph, sadly – fitted with an identical brake. Where that brake is less than identical to the one on the BSA is that it does work. Very well.

They're easy to work on. Luckily. All spares are available, too, so I availed myself of the availability and replaced the operating mechanism ... are you familiar with the Micram adjuster? You should be. Gosh and golly, but it's simply thrilling stuff, and cannot go wrong. Except...

It all went back together easily enough and I slung the wheel back into its forks, adjusted everything and applied the brake. It didn't work. I took it all apart again, reassembled it again, and ... it still didn't work. This is character-enhancing stuff. I recommend it to those who suffer from both idiots and insomnia. Every time I stripped and rebuilt the wheel, the brake worked a little better. Nothing had changed. I stripped it again, looked with urgent desperation at all the components, agreed in a silent conversation with myself that it should work fine. And I reassembled the entire thing again, possibly for the tenth time, possibly more. I can probably assemble a BSA conical hub brake in the dark with my eyes closed while whistling loud movie scores between my teeth, although I have no idea why anyone might do this. Maybe if they've recently watched the entire run of Twin Peaks, back to back. Maybe.

And the brake works now. There is no reason why it should, but it does. Not well, but well enough.

I was considering the deranged blackbird and its repetitive antics while reassembling the BSA's ignition system for maybe the twentieth time, and quite suddenly I felt a wave of kinship and a burst of understanding. Unlike the blackbird and his window, I can take the BSA to someone with Actual Skill. And maybe I should... CBG

'Are you familiar with the Micram adjuster? You should be. Gosh and golly, but it's simply thrilling stuff, and cannot go wrong. Except...'

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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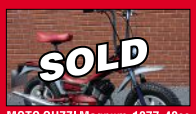

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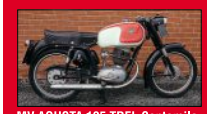
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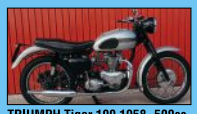
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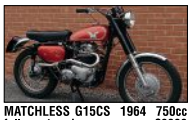
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