Norton's Atlas
CLASSIC CONTENDER

SWM Gran Turismo
YOUNG PRETENDER

CLASSIC BIKE · GUIDE

Slippery Sam
RIDDEN ON THE ROAD

Tech
WIRING LOOMING EXPLAINED

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FRANK WESTWORTH

One man's mate

PART OF THE endless entertainment of a magazine editor's life is the steady drizzle of complaints. No no; this is not a plea for sympathy – this particular editor enjoys all comment, whether it's positive and agreeable or the other thing. To provide a little perspective, on *CBG* there are maybe ten positives to every negative, which is very nice. Cuddly, almost.

That said, the grumbles are almost always more interesting. Some of them are idiot rants, personal attacks on writers whose views disagree with the ranters' sometimes very strange take on the realities of motorbicycling. There are oceans of mythology surrounding the history of motorcycles in general and of ancient British bikes in particular, although the facts are usually available, ranters always prefer theories, interpretations. Mysteriously motivated political conspiracy theories – which makes them interesting to read, if generally factually incorrect.

I usually reply … but sometimes I do not. Sometimes the weirdly personal attacks are just too … strange. Why write in to a magazine to mount a personal attack on someone who has written a piece offering their own views on, for example, a motorcycle? Disagreement is always fine, but personal attacks? Not a refutation of any facts presented by the author, but a simple unpleasant attack on the author or authors themselves.

Curious, no? It's like the little boy throwing stones at a window and then running away so that the owner of the window cannot throw them back. Or – if that target is a more civilised human – actually having a discussion, a conversation, chatting in a friendly way about a shared obsession.

Curious, no? Even more curious is the occasional reaction when I reply and explain the actual facts of the original story, usually – because I am that happy pedant – listing the sources I'm quoting. Often, due to happy circumstance rather than personal brilliance, I have known the characters involved and may have ridden the bikes under discussion. Which you might think to be a good thing – but no. It is instead some bizarre interpretation of 'eliteness' – a word I've just made up.

I was a little knocked out when Frank Melling sent in the shots of him riding Slippery Sam for his story. As with Alan Cathcart, some authors get the opportunity to ride lots of iconic motorcycles and then offer their thoughts on the experience. That's called journalism, I think.

That's it. See you out there.

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Kickback at the custard factory

THIS MONTH'S KICKBACK
Motorbike Show & Workshop Fair is at Birmingham's Custard Factory and pre-bookers can attend free of charge.

The event, sponsored by Allstyles Motorcycle Insurance, takes place on Saturday, July 15, at the Gibb Street Warehouse at the Custard Factory.

There will be more than 50 customs, café racers and classic motorcycles on display as well as around 20 suppliers providing parts, accessories, equipment, engineering services and clothing, making it a perfect mid-summer destination for all custom bike lovers and builders. The Custard Factory, located on the site of what was the Bird's Custard Factory in the industrial district, is now home to a thriving community of creative and digital businesses, independent shops, cafes and bars.

The show's open from 10am until 5.30pm and to qualify for free entrance visitors must register at TheCustomShow.com. Entry on the door without a valid ticket is £5. **To apply to display your custom motorcycle, café racer or rare classic, please email with photograph or book a trade space, email lorne@rwrw.co.uk**

BIG ZED
King of the road
p30

SOUTHERN CLASSICS
Kings of Kempton
p10

CLASSIC BIKE BOOKS
Right royal reading
p18

Above: Tickets are free to advance bookers

Below: The show attracts some of the best builders

1: A Gold Star for £2? It could be yours!

2: Raffle prize winner, Peter Baldasera, collects his prize, a 1954 AJS Model 18 500cc motorcycle, from the National Motorcycle Museum, accompanied by his wife, Ruth

3: Moto Guzzi twins make the perfect accompaniment to a Watsonian Grand Prix sidecar

1

2

MUSEUM'S GOLD STAR RAFFLE

THE WINNER OF the National Motorcycle Museum summer 2017 raffle will ride away on one of the most sought-after of classic motorcycles, a 1960 BSA 500cc DBD34 Gold Star Clubman. Second prize is a 1955 BSA C11G 250 and third prize is a luxury classic weekend hotel break for two people at the Windmill Village Hotel Golf Club and Spa. The draw will take place on Saturday, November 4, at the National Motorcycle Museum Live event.

The lucky winner of the first prize in the 2017 winter raffle, Roger Ward of Worksop, took away a brand new 1200cc Triumph Thruxton R. The raffle was drawn by World Superbike Champion Troy Bayliss live on stage at the International *Classic Motorcycle* Show at Stafford. Peter Baldasera, from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, won second prize in the museum's winter raffle, a 1954 AJS Model 18 that he will be adding to his classic bike collection. Third prize, a luxury classic weekend hotel break for two people, was won by Paul Wright of Ipswich.

Tickets for the summer 2017 raffle cost £2.00 each and will be distributed via subscription copies of the specialist press.

Tickets may also be obtained via the Museum on (01675) 444123 or ordered securely on-line from thenmm.co.uk

WATSONIAN WORLDWIDE SALES ROCKET

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST SIDECAR manufacturer has seen a big boost in demand from overseas customers during the first four months of 2017. Production at Watsonian Squire's factory in the North Cotswolds has increased by 50 per cent, with orders coming in from distributors in the USA, Indonesia and Austria, as well as private customers from France and the Netherlands.

"Last year, exports accounted for 30 per cent of production; this year we're exporting around 55 per cent," says sales director Ben Matthews. "Without a doubt the lower value of the pound has helped, but we also have the technical expertise to supply fitting kits too, so that shops can attach the sidecar to their customers' motorcycles safely and securely."

Watsonian has been making sidecars in the Heart of England for 105 years and is one of only a handful of major manufacturers in the world today. In the UK, sidecars must be fitted to the left side of the bike by law, whereas in most export markets they need to be fitted to the opposite side. Watsonian produces a wide range of bike-specific fittings for both set-ups.

One popular outfit is the Watsonian Grand Prix. Originally introduced in the 1960s, this single seater retains the octagonal nose shape first seen on the Watsonian Sports sidecar of 1930, giving it a timeless appearance. The body is made from glass fibre with a polished gelcoat finish, sitting in a welded tubular steel frame, with leading link suspension and a 16-inch spoked wheel. Prices for the Grand Prix start at £5,750 including VAT.

3

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Show & Tell

Not all Kempton Park events are entirely to do with racing horses, apparently…

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME
PICS BY OLIVER HULME AND IEISH GAMAH

EVENT SHOW REPORT

The next Classic Motorcycle Shows event is the 24th Carole Nash Eurojumble on Friday, September 1 and Saturday, September 2, at Meadowmead Farm Ringwood Road, Netley Marsh, Between Cadnam and Totton, Hampshire.

The next Kempton Park Autojumble is on Saturday, July 22. Gates open from 9.30am-4pm

THE LEGENDARY KEMPTON PARK racecourse usually echoes to the thunder of hooves, but every few months it's thundering motorcycles that are the focus in the leafy suburbs of west London.

In May, the hall below the main stand was the home of the one-day Southern Classic Motorcycle Show, which has been using the venue for nearly 30 years. Dozens of club stands and private entries were present, showing off machines that were painstakingly restored, well-used daily transports as well as a sizable number of impressive specials.

The show sat alongside a friendly motorcycle jumble where every stallholder seemed to know their neighbour, many of the 250 or so traders crossing hundreds of miles and even national borders to be there.

The show was a great opportunity for Home Counties clubs to attract new members and rub shoulders and a chance for private owners to show off their classic machines, as well as being a bustling attraction on the edge of the metropolis. The jumble was particularly well served for those looking for a rideable classic or a well-sorted project to get their hands dirty on, with many sellers taking advantage of the competitively priced Bike Mart to sell their machines.

NORTON P11A RANGER

THIS 1968 NORTON P11A Ranger is one of just a handful of these sought after bikes to be found in the UK. Owner Anthony Curzon, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things related to the Norton/Matchless 750 desert sleds, has four P11s and this is the rarest.

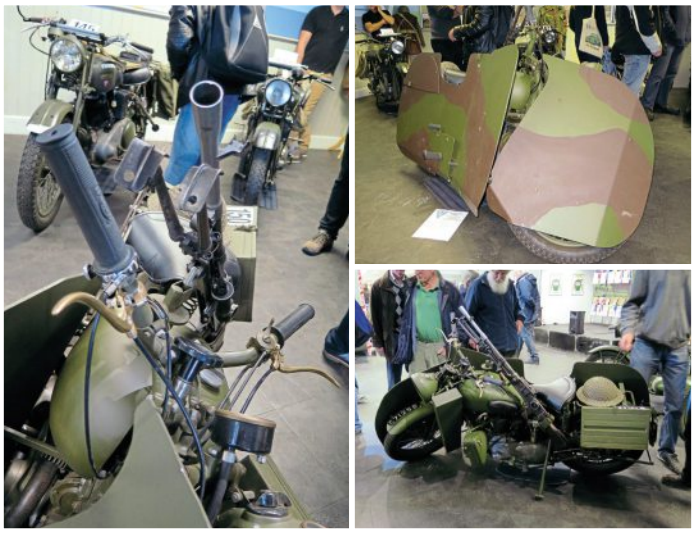
The P11 was built by AMC in Norton and Matchless badging to compete in the popular US desert racing competitions in California, Nevada and New Mexico. Originally conceived simply as a competition bike, P11s were fitted with lights and silencers for road use and eventually became the P11A Ranger, the last of the line. Owners would ride their P11As to the race venue, take the baffles out of the silencers, compete, and if they survived in one piece, bolt the pipes back together and ride their bikes home again. Created by mating a 750cc Norton Atlas engine with a G85CS (Competition Scrambles) Reynolds 531 lightweight steel frame, just 497 P11As were built; all of them were exported with none sold in the UK. This bike was sold new by Ron's Cycle Sales in Leominster, Massachusetts in 1968 and was imported back to the UK in 1984 by Anthony.

Film fans will know that the P11A Ranger is one of the two bikes used by Wyatt and Billy in Easy Rider to smuggle drugs at the start of the movie. Most P11s have a high pipe, unlike this model. Undeniably attractive, the P11 was one of the last bikes made by Norton while it was owned by AMC.

The Norton engine was made to fit the G85CS frame by turning the engine mounts upside down, while the rest of the bike was largely Matchless and fitted with Teledraulic forks with modified internals. Concessions to desert racing included a large air filter, a gear shift guard welded to the frame cradle and a bash plate to protect the engine.

Anthony's P11A Ranger gets regular use. "It's just a beautiful bike," he says. "It will do anything you want, and it's such a shame that it came so late, just when they were getting everything so right."

TRIUMPH 350 BREN GUN CARRIER



NORMANDY OLD BIKE SOCIETY (NOBS) – the military wing of the East Berkshire AJS & Matchless Club – brought along a fine collection of military machines, including Enfields, Triumphs and Matchless G3s, as well as militaria including dispatch riders' gear and a selection of deactivated weaponry. But pride of place on the stand went to Sean Walsh's Triumph 3HW Bren Gun Carrier replica.

The bike was created when Sean heard about a last-ditch effort created in Sussex in the darkest days of 1940 when German paratroopers were expected to land at any minute. With most of the Army's tracked Bren Gun Carriers left behind at Dunkirk and little in the way of transport to hand, it was recognised that getting troops to the scene of any landing and stopping the enemy from getting to their separately dropped equipment was paramount.

The officer commanding the reconnaissance battalion at Hastings/Pevensey decided that a solo motorcycle was the best way of doing this as it could cross fields more easily than a sidecar outfit. The battalion's Triumph 3SW was fitted with an armoured shield – made at Chatham Dockyard – on the right-hand side and a mount for a Bren gun fitted on the left. The tool box was removed, mounted on a bracket sticking out of the left-hand side and filled with 50lb of lead to make the bike balanced enough to ride.

The theory was that if paratroopers were spotted, the pilot of the two-wheeled armoured vehicle would hurry off in their direction, followed quickly by his fellow platoon members who would be on foot. On arrival at the landing ground he would either dismount the Bren from the bike and find cover, or engage the enemy from behind the armoured shield of his Triumph. With paratroopers armed only with hand guns when they landed until they could get to their equipment containers, it was hoped that the in 10 minutes or so before the rest of the British troops arrived, the heavy fire from the Bren would be enough to hold up the paratroopers and buy enough time to stop them. If the help didn't get there, the rider was expected to retreat rapidly, having done as much damage as he could, though the chances of survival alone were minimal.

The standard Triumph 3SW weighs about 312lb and has a four-speed gearbox, being good for around 55mph. With the extra equipment, this bike weighs more than 600lb… and that is with a mild steel shield, rather than the armour plated one made at Chatham. The eagle eyed will realise that this isn't a 3SW at all – which was a sidevalve 350 that produced 10hp – but is made from a 3HW, which is the later overhead valve version developed from the prewar 3H. Sean discovered the bike rotting away in Greece and brought it back to the UK in 2005 to become part of the Walsh family's small collection of military vehicles. You can see details of the collection at **www.wfvc.co.uk**.

NORTON ROTARY CAFÉ RACER

ON THE ROTARY Owners' Club stand was a rather spectacular Norton Rotary café racer, built by David Brown. The bike is based on a crash-damaged liquid cooled 1989 Norton Commander tourer that David bought direct from Norton when it was based at Rugeley in Staffordshire in 2005.

Originally, he intended to streetfighter the rotary, but as the project rolled on it evolved into the café racer it is today. The Manx Norton replica tank was originally flat bottomed, so had to be re modelled underneath to accommodate the rotary's monocoque frame, which doubles as a plenum chamber to help cool the engine.

The 588cc water-cooled engine is unusual in that it is exposed, and without the massive finning that surrounds the air-cooled engine it's possible to see just how compact the rotary engine is, with only three moving parts inside. The front end of the café racer is from a Kawasaki ZX7R, while the rear seat and tail piece are custom items designed for a Suzuki GSX-R1100, sourced in Florida after David spotted the vanes and liked the look of them. The swinging arm came from Spondon, and the delicious stainless steel and titanium exhaust system was made by Geoff Madden and includes the exhaust ejector.

Because the bike runs a total loss lubrication system, similar to a two-stroke, the ejector system collects any waste oil that hasn't already been recycled through the carburettors. Without the ejector, the bike would be difficult to silence and would shoot two-foot long flames from the exhaust. The paint job is by Dream Machine, based on the John Player Special livery used by the Norton race team of the 1980s, and the piratical logos were inspired by the Pirates of the Caribbean movies.

While not as fast as the racing rotaries, the special is a lot more powerful in its current form that it was when it first rolled out of the factory, and it produces a crackle from the exhaust reminiscent of Norton's rotary racing days. It's certainly very different from its life when it was a Commander touring bike and the steed of the Norton Owners' Club chairman. David says the bike is "still evolving" and he hopes at some point to replace the black steel radiator with something more attractive in curved aluminium.

NORVIN CAFÉ RACER

IT COULD HAVE been built by Ogri, and was the first jaw-dropping attraction as you came through the doors of the hall under the grandstand. Officially it's a 1957 Norvin café racer, but that barely begins to describe this vision in aluminium and steel.

Roy Martin built the Vincent engine and gearbox to Black Lightning spec from aftermarket parts, rather than using up rare originals. "The Vincent engine is such an untidy thing anyway," said Roy. The engine has high compression pistons and Terry Price K4 racing camshafts, and nearly everything else in or on the engine has been uprated in some way. Norvins aren't exactly common, but Roy felt that on most of the examples he has seen the Vincent engine usually looks a little cramped and slightly tilted forward in the Wideline Featherbed frame. So rather than squeezing the engine into place he made the frame two inches wider and three inches longer. A set of Norton Roadholder forks looks after the front end, and BSA/Triumph's notorious conical hub is supposed to bring the behemoth to a halt, but Roy would like to upgrade. Rejecting for now the idea of using Ceriani forks and front brake as being too common, he is hoping that the pound eventually recovers enough against the Yen for him to be able to afford a replica Honda racing drum as fitted to that brand's all-conquering road racers in the 1960s.

A five-gallon alloy Manx Norton replica tank was found on eBay, and the gap that Norton included at the rear to accommodate the big single's bellmouth now neatly holds the ignition switch. By cutting up foam plumber's pipe he was able to make a template up for the tightly tucked in and visually stunning exhausts – made up by Competition Fabrications in Norfolk. The standard specification Vincent primary drive, clutch and gearbox fitted to the bike used mainly new parts – the clutch is about the only original Vincent component in the bike. Carburettors are 32mm Amal Mk1 Concentrics.

Roy says he has built or modified pretty much everything on the bike apart from the battery, tyres and wheel rims. At the front end is what looks like a Manx Norton racing plate, but which has an unobtrusive projector headlight in the centre. Built into the racing seat hump is a sculpted tail light. The tidying up of the machine is obsessive and includes the fitting of a cable-free GPS driven digital speedometer which Roy admits isn't strictly legal, but as the bike is MoT exempt, he won't be losing any sleep over that.

ARIEL SQUARE FOU

THIS ARIEL SQUARE FOUR Mk.II has been in the same family since 1964, and has been pressed into service as a sidecar hauler, on the school run and as a long distance commuter.

The 1955 model was bought by Ralph Hawkins from Weymouth as a non-runner, after the timing chain jumped a tooth. Repaired and made ready for the road, Ralph claimed that the plunger framed Ariel could crack over 100mph. Ralph's son borrowed the bike in the 1960s when his own AJS 650 snapped its crankshaft, and the Ariel was used as school transport until he left education and secured a job in Oxfordshire. Then the Ariel was used on the commute from Weymouth to Banbury.

The engine received the first of just two rebuilds in the 1970s and the electrical system was uprated to 12 Volts.

Mike Hawkins, Ralph's grandson, has been told that he had his first motorcycling experience as a baby in the early 1980s being carried by the Ariel – which by then had a sidecar attached – to a rally on the Isle of Wight. Mike also caught the biking bug, and after a dalliance with two-strokes recalls following his grandfather to Poole Bike Nights on much more modern Japanese four-strokes. He has a lasting memory of following him down the Wareham bypass, smoke curling from the exhausts of the Ariel.

After Ralph's untimely passing in 2006 the Ariel was relegated to the back of the garage until 2016 when it was decided to return the big 1950s bruiser to the road. Although by then he was the pilot of a Ducati ST2, the Square Four had made an instant impression on Mike.

Recommissioning started with a new battery and fresh petrol, after which a dozen kicks were all that was needed to bring the beast back to life. The rest of the work is an ongoing project, and the delicious patina – from the worn pinstriping round the petrol tank's chromed panels to the slice of inner tube protecting the distributor – sets off the Ariel. Apart from a small patch on the tank, the Ariel still has its original paint. The engine is currently in flush-through mode with an oil tank full of modern multigrade for the last 200 miles – replacing this is the next job. The old square-section Avon sidecar tyres have been swapped for more modern Metzelers.

Although the Square is currently still on sidecar gearing, Mike intends to replace the rear sprocket and fit a longer chain to put less strain on the engine. Mike freely admits to having limited spannering skills and expressed his thanks to members of the West Thames Ariel Motorcycle Owners' Club for their advice to a British motorcycle owning novice.

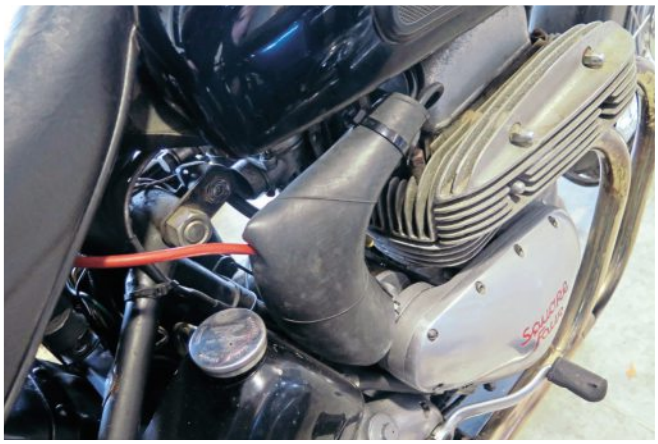
SUZUKI T500L

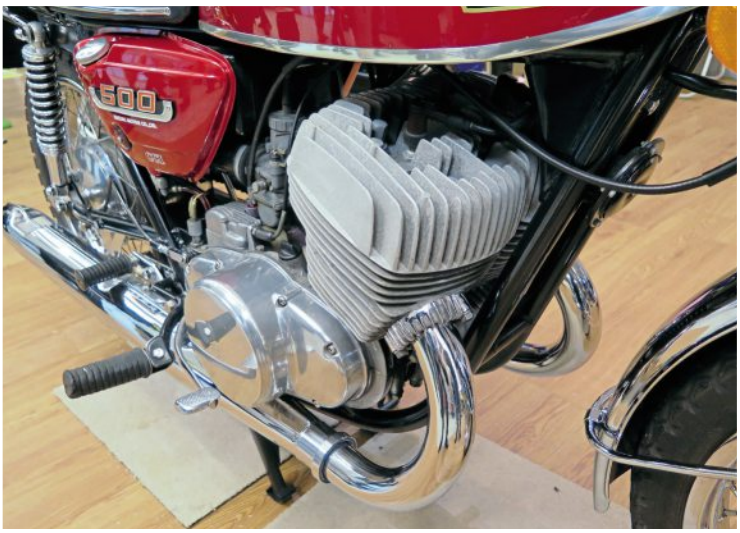
EARLY AND MID 1970s Suzuki two-strokes are getting increasingly popular among restorers, and there are good reasons for that. Their relative mechanical simplicity helps, for one thing, as does the longevity of the models.

Suzuki was more inclined to change the appearance of its bikes rather than the running gear, so there are lots of interchangeable bits. Their original purchasers, except perhaps in the case of the GT250 among learners, tended to be gentler on their machines, and less likely to rip bits off to make them faster. Suzuki marketed its bikes as sports-tourers, rather than out-and-out speed machines.

That's not to say that it's an easy job. Colin Day's 1973 T500L took a dozen years to complete and was finished in 2005. It's been on the road ever since.

He bought a basket case T500L which had already been dismantled with some of the parts already sold on. A new engine was found in Stockport and the tank and side panels were sent off to JBS in Somerset for a restoration job, while the alloy parts, from the engine casings to the wheel hubs, went off for polishing and cleaning. Suzuki front brake drums – which the company paid special attention to, drilling extra holes and interrupted finning to aid cooling – are popular with classic racers and Colin has had to turn down increasingly lucrative offers for his.





New old stock pipes and a seat were found at the Stafford Show, and the frame sent off for powder coating. Frustratingly, he found when he got the frame back that at some point in the past for mysterious reasons, the lock stop had been removed from the frame, so a fresh one had to be welded in place and powder coating re-done. He carried on collecting parts for years, with wheel rims coming from Crooks, unlike a set of footrest hangers that turned out to be bent and also needed repairing and re-powder coating. The bike still runs on its original wiring loom, which Colin says is still in good condition.

"I don't think about how much I've spent on it," Colin says. "It's just been a real labour of love."

NORTON ES2

A FINE EXAMPLE of what can be done with an 'oily rag' purchase was entered in the private section by Vince Gill.

The 1957 Norton ES2 was bought by Vince from Andy Tiernan Classics in Suffolk in 2012 with a number of non-standard parts, and the decision was made to restore the bike to its original condition. The ES2 was stripped down to its bare frame, the black steel was powder coated, the chrome was metal polished and rechromed, including the primary chaincase – a non-standard finish which Vince added to improve the bike's look.

The engine turned out to be in excellent trim, and after stripping the head and barrel it was found to be well within tolerances. The barrel was powder coated black, the head and rocker cover were bead blasted and the top-end was reassembled with stainless bolts, studs and nuts. The gearbox needed refurbishing and had a new mainshaft fitted.

The Norton still has the wiring harness it was fitted with when it left Suffolk, though its flexibility indicates that the loom was a replacement. The petrol tank was painted with two-pack paint and the side panels rechromed.

After vapour blasting the original carburettor it was found to be leaking, and after struggling with it for a while it was clear that this leak was there for good – so a new Amal Monobloc was fitted. Norton experts will notice that the seat has a non-standard profile, which Vince prefers.

The polishing mop was applied to the fork legs, a new speedometer was bolted on and the liberal use of stainless fasteners was applied to the rest of the machine. 973 KPU might not be entirely standard or exactly as it came off the production line, but it is classic biking at its practical best. CBG

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Classic bike books

CBG's selection of summer reads range from hands-on technical manuals to glossy coffee table hardbacks, and even a couple of books for the beach…

WINGS, WHEELS AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

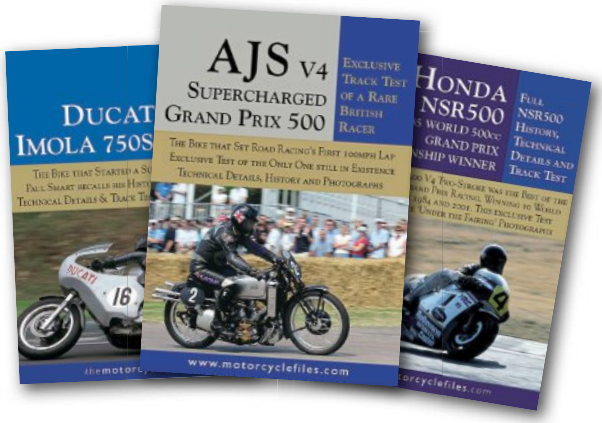
LEWIS LEATHERS HAVE produced a stunning photo-history which traces the company's fortunes from the 1920s and celebrates the firm's 60th anniversary. Inevitably many of the archive images feature Lewis Leather-clad riders but the pictures also portray flying and motoring as seen in vintage catalogues and original adverts. Lots of these illustrations of racers, riders and aviators have never been published before and there are 1600 images in total, printed in glorious quality across 240 pages. Some pages are dedicated to the clothing itself, so you can see exactly how the black leather jacket has evolved over the decades. Others reveal the previously-unseen back-room story of Lewis Leathers through a series of photos from the company's East End workshop. The book also includes a special 'rocker's diary' section featuring photos from the 59 Club.

Wings, Wheels and Rock 'n' Roll by Derek Harris and Rin Tanaka costs £60 from lewisleathers.com

AN EDITORIAL EFFORT

FANS OF FRANK Westworth's writing will be entertained and possibly amazed to discover that *CBG's* editor has also penned a series of critically-acclaimed fictional crime-thrillers. Described as a 'cross between Jack Reacher and the Girl With The Dragon Tattoo', Frank's newest full-length novel is The Redemption Of Charm. For folks who prefer rapid reads, a series of quick thrillers called The Stoner Stories introduce the series' anti-hero; a reluctant assassin who happens to ride a Harley-Davidson. (Well, no one can be perfect.) All come with an 'explicit content' advisory and should be considered 18-rated – you have been warned…

The Stoner Stories and Killing Sisters books are all available at Amazon or murdermayhemandmore.net



THE MOTORCYCLE FILES

AFTER DECADES OF thrashing fast bikes around race tracks, that man Alan Cathcart has built up a simply staggering archive of information about iconic and very often unique racers and roadbikes. Taking advantage of modern technology, he's sharing his roadtests, data and insider info in a series of ebooks, The Motorcycle Files.

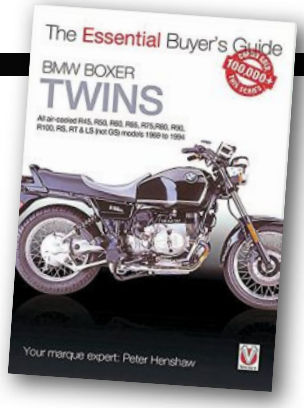
Since it was launched a couple of years ago, the range of Motorcycle Files has been constantly expanded, and now covers 24 of the most rare and significant racing motorcycles and exotic streetbikes ever built. These include the prototype 1963 Ducati Apollo V4 1260 and the 1939 supercharged AJS 500cc V4, running through to the four-cylinder 500 Grand Prix two-strokes from Honda, Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki which lined up on GP grids during the 1980s and 90s. RC readers will definitely enjoy the story of the Triumph T100R Daytona; Norton's Daytona winners of the 1940s and 1950s; BSA's MC1 racing prototype; the AJS triple knocker TT winner, and the Indian Sport Scout.

Cathcart's hands-on riding impressions are backed up by fact-packed model histories, technical features and, where possible, interviews with the riders and engineers involved in developing and racing these bikes back in their prime. GP race fans will find it particularly interesting to view the stripped-down detail photography of the engines and other technically interesting features of the most famous motorcycles in Grand Prix history, or rare roadbike prototypes which never reached the marketplace.

More Motorcycle Files are in the pipeline, so look out for the legendary 1950s Moto Guzzi 500 V8 and the 500 Bicilindrica which preceded it, the failed but fabulous oval-piston Honda NS500 Grand Prix racer of the 1980s and its limited edition NR750 road-going derivative, and Giacomo Agostini's multiple world champion three-cylinder MV Agusta all coming soon. Each Motorcycle File is the equivalent of a 50 to 75 page book, and all are lavishly illustrated in full colour.

'The Motorcycle Files' ebooks by Alan Cathcart and Bruce Cox cost around £2.50 each on Amazon.

BMW BOXER TWINS

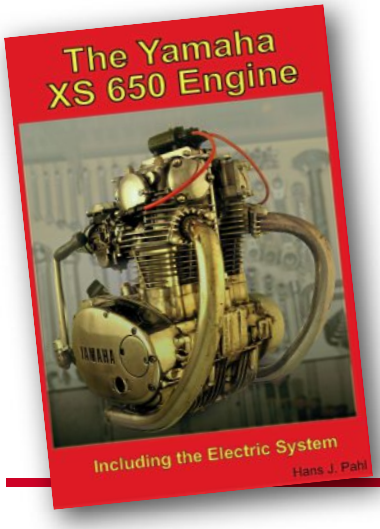


THIS NO-FRILLS BUYER'S guide provides essential information for prospective purchasers of BMW's airhead twins built between 1969 and 1994, although it doesn't specifically cover GS machines. There's info about most other popular models including R80 and R100, RS, RT and LS types, the iconic R90 and the smaller R45 and R60 offshoots too. The A5-size paperback includes a detailed, step by step guide of points to look for at purchase; the reality of living with a Beemer boxer; the relative value of each model; spares prices; faults and foibles, facts and figures and useful contacts.

The BMW Boxer Twins Essential Buyer's Guide by Peter Henshaw costs £12.99 from veloce.co.uk

THE YAMAHA XS650 ENGINE

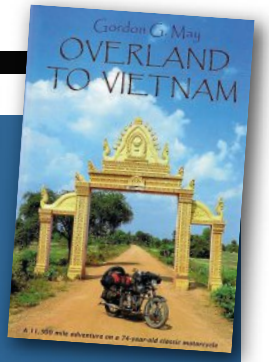
OWNERS OF CLASSIC Japanese motorcycles can struggle to access technical information about their steeds. The vertical twin engine of one of the more popular machines, the Yamaha XS650, now features in a book by German engineer Hans-Joachim Pahl. The book is meant as a supplement to the original workshop manual and it provides a detailed description of the Yamaha XS650 engine based on more than 400 colour photos using a cutaway engine as its source.



The detail is impressive and contains many tips and details for the home mechanic. It'll help anyone who has the necessary equipment and basic knowledge to perform engine rebuilds and repair work. An owner might also find it useful to loan the book to anyone about to work on their engine. The electrical system of the XS650 is described with excellent colour photos and graphics, and there is a design for a simplified wiring harness. A clearly understandable translation from an earlier work in German, this publication also includes a handy list of European parts suppliers which makes it a welcome, almost essential addition to any XS650 owner's library.

The Yamaha XS650 Engine by Hans-Joachim Paul costs £24.95 on Amazon

OVERLAND TO VIETNAM



ADVENTURER GORDON MAY always tells a ripping yarn and the story of his latest epic trek, aboard a Second World War Matchless from the UK to Vietnam, is another compelling and eye-opening tale. Gordon travelled 11,500 miles on a 1941 350 single which had recently been repatriated from Myanmar. The G3L was reconditioned and modified for the rigours of unpaved roads and river crossings but remained, in essence, a simple 1940s British pushrod single.

As ever, Gordon's journey was undertaken solo; no camera crew or accompanying support team to fall back on. His route took him across Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan. He then travelled over the Kunjerab Pass, the world's highest paved international border crossing, which separates China from Pakistan. He and his Matchless endured ice, snow and tropical heat through backbreaking terrain, petrol shortages, crazy traffic, breakdowns, a sandstorm of biblical proportions in Uzbekistan and a major earthquake in Pakistan.

"The challenges on a journey like this are constant," explains Gordon. "It's not just the physical wear and tear on the bike and your own body, day in, day out, but you have to keep mentally focused at all times. This was especially evident during the earthquake in Pakistan. I was virtually seconds away from being hit by falling rocks. It was sheer luck that I was in between two landslides and that I escaped unscathed. However, the sights I saw and the people I met provided immense highs too. The extent of people's hospitality and their openness was truly heart-warming."

After crossing the plains of northern India and Nepal, Gordon rode through the jungles of Myanmar. "Travelling through Myanmar an a machine that had spent almost 70 years in that very country was particularly poignant as it was just after the results of landmark elections which saw the first elected civilian leader in more than 50 years."

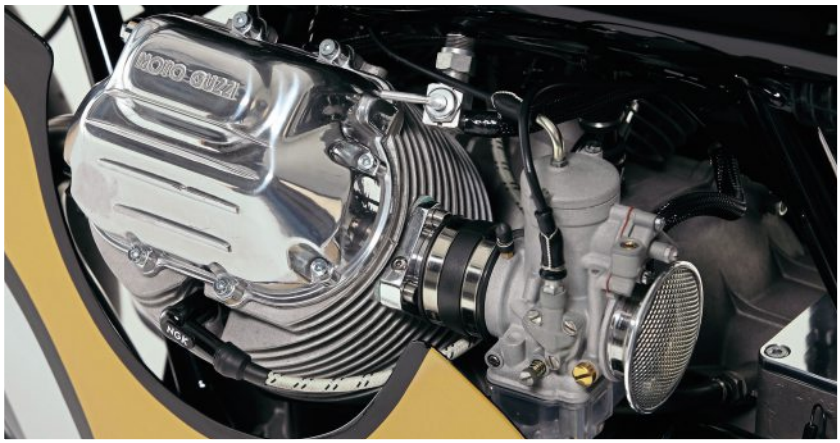
Finally, he arrived in Vietnam, travelling the stunning coastal highway between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The entire journey took three months and Gordon tells the whole story in great detail – including all the high points and low moments, mechanical and emotional – in this 432-page hardback or paperback with 16 pages of colour photos.

Overland to Vietnam by Gordon G May costs £11.95 in paperback from overlandtovietnam.com

Made to blast

If street racer Guzzi twins are unusual enough; try this Honda-inspired special for size

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME



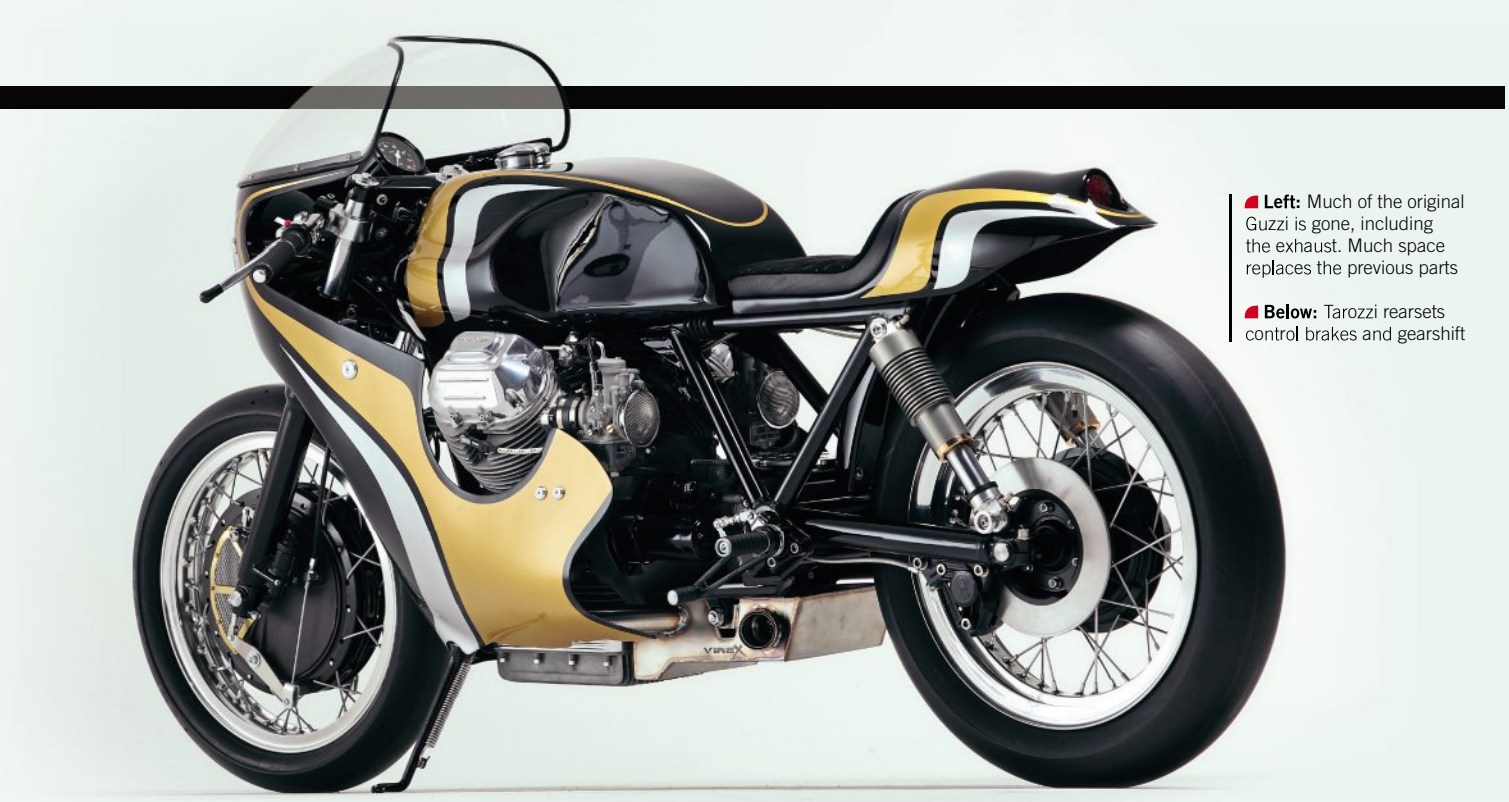
MOTO GUZZI'S BIG V-twins should, on paper, be an unsuitable base for a performance sports bike. The original air-cooled 90-degree transverse V-twin with a longitudinal crankshaft and a big shaft drive is more akin to BMW's flat twins than anything with sporting pretensions. The engine was designed in the early 1960s by engineer Giulio Cesare Carcano, creator of the legendary DOHC Moto Guzzi V8 Grand Prix racer that wowed the world in the 1950s.

The V-twin was less outlandish and began life as the Moto Guzzi entry in a competition sponsored by the Italian government. The authorities wanted to find a big purposeful bike to use as an alternative to the BMWs that most European governments issued to their police forces. That the design won was unsurprising as the Italian government, with a big motorcycle industry of their own to support, was unlikely to pick a German model. It proved perfect for the job, with the LAPD eschewing Harley-Davidsons in favour of Guzzi twins – even the Berlin police have a number in their fleet today. In civilian trim the twin was a hit and Moto Guzzi motorcycles moved in a new design direction away from the Falcone flat singles that had been sustaining the company.

Above: One 425cc cylinder on each side

Right: On its own, the 300mm Fontana front brake could cost you more than many a motorcycle

Below: A Moto Guzzi inspired by a Honda, apparently



Left: Much of the original Guzzi is gone, including the exhaust. Much space replaces the previous parts

Below: Tarozzi rearsets control brakes and gearshift

PRICE GUIDE

£4,000 to £9,000
(Standard 850 T3)

FAULTS & FOIBLES

Moto Guzzi twins are very strong motorcycles but some 1970s and 80s models suffer from poor quality components supplied by outside contractors. The De Tomaso organisation that owned Guzzi from 1973 fitted almost exclusively Italian parts, which looked stylish but were more trouble-prone than their Japanese contemporaries. Pay careful attention to the condition of the chrome and the electrical system. The transverse engine and shaft also produce a strong sideways torque reaction which can be disconcerting for the inexperienced rider.

ALSO CONSIDER

Laverda's 750SF was built to be indestructible and remain so. The parallel twin cylinder engine is massively over-engineered and strong though the bike is heavier than other bikes of the same vintage. Ducati 860 GTS has finer handling and better performance but is far more mechanically complex. BMW's R75/5 makes an excellent tourer, but lacks the Guzzi's charm

OWNERS' CLUB

Moto Guzzi Club GB
motoguzziclub.co.uk

The original 1967 Moto Guzzi V7 with the Carcano engine has been continuously developed since the 1960s, first growing to 750, then into 850, 900 and 1,200cc versions. The concept remains the basis of the Guzzi twins available new today. In 1971 Lino Tonti redesigned the motor to create a power plant for the Moto Guzzi V7 Sport but the engine gained real sporting pretensions with the arrival of the 850 Le Mans in 1976. The massive cylinders, huge Dell'Orto carbs, black exhausts and stunning styling created a muscle bike and grand tourer to compete on equal terms with Ducati's 900ss and Laverda's Jota. The Le Mans cemented Moto Guzzi in the minds of Europeans as a sports bike maker and the V-twin has been much loved ever since.

Tucked away in the small town of Roveredo, in Piano northwest of Trieste, are custom builders Stile Italiano – which means Italian Style. Started by a group of friends in 1996, Stile Italiano became a full-time business in 1999, offering new and used modern motorcycles, vintage and collectables and customised specials which they sell in Italy and around the world. Many of the crew have gone racing, both as individuals and as a motorcycle team in the Italian Superstock and Italian Autostoriche Championship. In the workshop alongside such rarities as a Harley-Davidson XLCR 1000 café racer and a Bimota there are a bevy of Triumphs and Nortons as well as a fine selection of Italian 70s exotica prepared for sale. But it's not just about shifting metalwork, and designer Gianluca Tiepolo and his fellow fettlers have created this bike, dubbed the Moto Guzzi CR950.

Gianluca said: "Guzzis are our roots and we still love them, we just decided to build the most elegant one possible." The donor bike is a far more pedestrian T3 850cc tourer but, as Gianluca says, "nothing remains of it".

The bike takes some of its design cues from Honda's legendary CR750 racer, as piloted by Dave Mann at Daytona in 1970. The frame was modified around the rear end and the rear shocks are super-rare Fox items. These air shocks operate solely by working with compressed air and have no springs. The design team dropped the linked braking system of the stock Guzzi and fitted a single period Brembo disc caliper which grips a cast iron rotor. This, along with the gearshift, is operated by Tarozzi rear-sets and the hubs at both ends are laced into spoked wheels with alloy rims. These have racing slicks wrapped around them – this is a bike that's more likely to see the track than the road. ➧

BUY IT NOW

Looking for a Guzzi Le Mans? Made in Italy Motorcycles have this Le Mans 2, fitted out with loads of hard to get genuine period Guzzi parts like the original wire wheels, genuine Le Mans 1 fuel tank, S3 seat, V7 sport rear mudguard and the classic sporting Guzzi paintwork. £7,950. Visit madeinitalymotorcycles.com

At the front end, a pair of early 1980s Suzuki forks with anti-dive were added. These were matched to a 300mm Fontana 4LS magnesium racing drum brake, complete with brass dust filters. Smaller versions of these brakes could be found on early works Triumph Trident racers. If you want to buy one today you can find a replica – but don't expect to see much change out of £2,500.

The CR950's full fairing is a restored 1970s unit from a Honda racer modified to accommodate the V-twin's transverse heads. A hand-made alloy petrol tank with a racing filler cap has a cutaway underneath to tidy up the location for a battery. Moving the battery and using bellmouths on the carbs means there is a large gap under the seat and that seat and hump are one-offs created by Stile Italiano. Clip-on bars have been fitted to the Suzuki forks which sit in modified Guzzi yokes, and the speedometer is an original V7 Sport item mounted in a custom fitting.

The 950cc engine has twin plugs per cylinder and has been ported and fitted with 40mm Dell'Orto carburettors, though these are round slide items rather than the massive flat slides of the Le Mans. There is a Dynatek ignition system, and Gianluca describes the engine as being "very powerful". Stile Italiano designed the one-off lightweight Virex exhaust that sits under the gearbox rather than stretching the length of the bike to tidy up the cosmetic appearance. The paintwork has what is known as a mirror effect that gives a depth to the black and gold look – a job that Gianluca simply describes as "very expensive". Given the cost of the rest of the components, that indicates it was very expensive indeed.

The whole bike drips with stainless screws and fastenings and chunks of machined and polished brass and aluminium, yet the whole job took just four months to complete. The stunning CR950 has now been sold on – to finance the next Italian masterpiece. CBG

Round slide Dell'Orto carbs replace the bigger flat sliders you might expect

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MANUFACTURED: 1975 to 1983 **ENGINE:** Air-cooled OHV 90-degree transverse V-twin **BORE/STROKE:** 83mm x 78mm capacity: 844cc **COMPRESSION:** 9.5:1 **POWER:** 68hp @ 7,000rpm **TORQUE:** 54 ft/lbs @ 5800rpm **TRANSMISSION:** Five-speed, shaft drive **FRAME:** Twin tube steel cradle with removable bottom tubes **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Cartridge-damped telescopic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Twin oil-damped shocks **FRONT BRAKE:** Two 300mm cast iron discs, Brembo single piston calipers **REAR BRAKE:** Single 242mm cast iron disc, Brembo single piston caliper **FRONT TYRE:** 3.50 x 18 **REAR TYRE:** 4.10 x 18 **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32 inches **DRY WEIGHT:** 220kg/485lbs **FUEL CAPACITY:** 5.3 gallons **TOP SPEED:** 120mph

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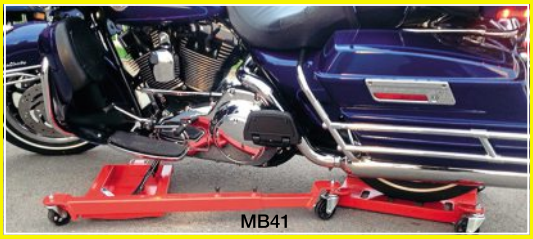

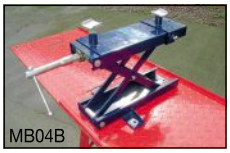

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WORDS AND PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: Despite Norton's excellent reputation as sports and racing specialists, the entire Dominator series was styled in a generally conservative fashion. Eagle-eyes might spot a neat battery charger lead, too

1: Almost the last of the long Dominator line, the 745cc Atlas was underrated for years, a poor rep for bad vibes being the reason. Ridden at 'classic' speeds, however, they're strong, torqued-up and smooth enough

2: The Atlas engine can be easily identified by the crankcase breather at the front left end of the camshaft tunnel. Observe the balance pipe between the carbs: forget to fit this at your peril

TRIUMPH SET THE STANDARD with their Speed Twin, leaving other manufacturers scrambling to grab a share of the market with their own 500cc twin offerings. Enlisting Bert Hopwood, who had worked on the development of the Speed Twin, to design their engine, Norton unveiled their first twin, the Model 7 in 1949. With this launch of their Dominator dynasty, Norton announced their twin as a 'leader of multi-cylinder contemporary design with roadholding qualities and smooth urging power which had to be experienced to be appreciated'.

Dimensions of 66mm bore and 72.6mm stroke gave the first Dominator 497cc. The pre-unit twin came with a cast iron barrel and head; light alloy alternatives were available at extra cost and later Model 7s had an alloy head as standard. Roadholder forks were fitted, with the Model 7 using the same plunger frame as Norton's earlier ES2 single, until 1953 when a swinging arm was introduced on both models.

In 1950 Norton enjoyed considerable racing success using the now famous Featherbed frame. Capitalising on this, the Model 88 was introduced in 1952, with the American market being first to enjoy the combination of the twin engine, Featherbed frame and Roadholder forks. Contemporary road tests glowed with praise for the Dominator's consistently superb steering and reliable, confident handling at high speed.

A thirst for power saw the engine grow to 596cc in 1956 for the Featherbed-framed Model 99, then the Model 77 was introduced for sidecar use and the Nomad scrambler export model was despatched to America, both of them using a robust non-featherbed swinging arm frame. In 1960 the slimline Featherbed frame was introduced and engine capacity upped to 646cc, creating the Manxman for America, followed by the twin-carb 650SS and the single-carb Mercury. A further boost to 745cc in 1962 ultimately produced the Atlas engine... as seen here.

As the Atlas was initially available only for the American market, it was styled to suit, with high handlebars and a small 2½ gallon petrol tank. Deeply valanced chrome mudguards with heavy beading along the edges emphasised the contrast of the chunky back tyre against the skinny front. The legendary slimline Featherbed frame and Roadholder forks ensured confident handling. With a lower compression ratio than the 650 Dominators, the Atlas engine delivered the same 49bhp, but with a broader spread of power. With masses of torque and the ability to pull effectively in any gear, the Atlas also found favour with some police forces.

The Atlas powerplant was also used in a variety of AMC hybrids aimed initially at the American off-road market. Thousands were produced, including a multitude of Norton and Matchless N and G15 variants, the AJS Model 33 and the P11.

In 1964 the Atlas became available in the UK market with electrics upgraded to 12V courtesy of two 6V batteries in series, plus twin carbs and wider yokes. Sharing the same brakes and running gear as the other Dominators, the Atlas featured a quick release rear wheel with handsome grey rubber grommets. A rev counter was available as an optional extra, while the handlebars could be changed or the Atlas set up for sidecar use with appropriate forks, gears and suspension at no additional cost.

Atlases have a reputation for being terribly vibratory as a result of the engine's increase from its initial 500 to 750cc. Hence subsequent developments, as the Atlas engine evolved into the 750 Commando with a new frame and Norton's Isolastic rubber mountings to counteract bad vibes. The Commando eventually ended up with an 828cc engine, suitably cushioned by the same Isolastic mounts.

Sandy bought this 1967 Atlas five years ago. It had been imported from America by a guy who'd bought a really nice T120 Bonneville. Looking into shipping costs revealed that buying a two-bike crate and getting it shipped home cost little more than for a single bike, so the Norton was bought to help fill the crate. Although it was purchased as a non-runner, the Atlas thankfully turned out to be reasonably sound. Sandy did a top end rebuild, replaced the valves and sorted out the carburation. The frame was stripped, repainted and rebuilt, all topped off by a nice new seat.

As it had lived for most of its life in a dry American state, the Atlas hadn't been exposed to the elements in the way that bikes in Britain often are. The original wheels were found to have good rims despite their age. Less fortunately, the battery had been leaking, subsequently causing issues with the exhaust pipes and silencers which needed to be replaced. The original mudguards with their distinctive V at the front and the stays were rechromed by Sean Agbrigg in Leeds, who gave a nice speedy turn around.

Sandy sorted out the electrics, doing away with the Zener diode. He fitted a modern, one-block rectifier/regulator along with Boyer electronic ignition

PRICE GUIDE
£5000 to £9000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Check for fractures to brackets, stays and such from high-rev vibes. Single carb smooths the ride and is easier to set up than a pair

ALSO CONSIDER
Norton Commando: more choice, probably more expensive. Royal Enfield Interceptor: another charismatic big twin, similar prices. Norton Mercury: possibly the sweetest Dominator but very rare

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3: Practical touches include a QD rear wheel with handsome grey bungs. Ignore all bikes fitted with black bungs. Tsk, tsk; the very idea

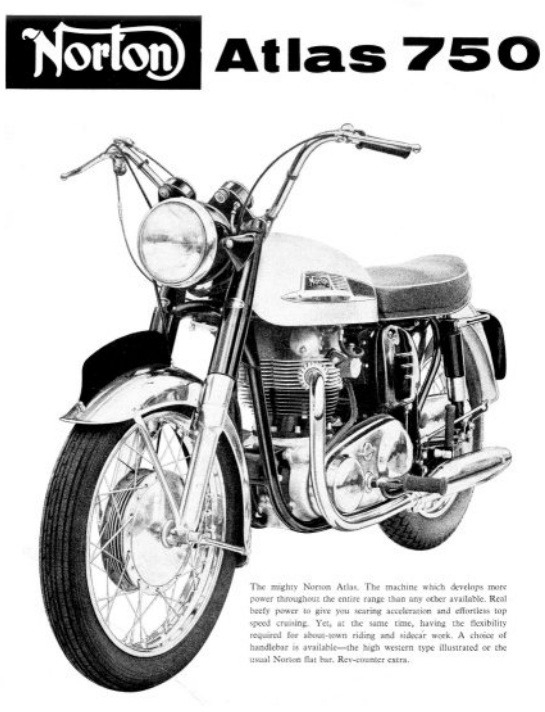
4: Oil line tap fitted to prevent wet sumping. Fit if you must; forget to turn it on, and…

5: Later Atlas machines usually came equipped with a tacho to match the speedo. Spare chain links are a rider's touch

BUY IT NOW

This 1966 Atlas has been restored to a very high standard, with many useful upgrades and modifications. It's on offer at classicbikes-sussex.co.uk for £11,999. 07989 751567

Right: Heat sink for the modern electrics and a 2ls front brakeplate from a Commando are both sensible additions, making one of the most practical classics even more so



MANUFACTURED: 1962 to 1968 **ENGINE:** air-cooled four-stroke ohv parallel twin **BORE / STROKE:** 73mm x 89mm **CAPACITY:** 745cc **COMPRESSION:** 7.6:1 **POWER:** 49bhp **CARBURETTOR:** Amal Monobloc (x2 from 1964), Amal Concentric x2 in 1967 **IGNITION:** Magneto initially/coil/alternator on later models **LIGHTING:** 6V until 1964 then 12V **LUBRICATION:** dry sump **CLUTCH:** wet multiplate **GEARBOX:** AMC four-speed positive change **PRIMARY DRIVE:** chain **FINAL DRIVE:** chain **FRONT BRAKE:** 8-inch sls full-width drum **REAR BRAKE:** 7-inch sls full width drum **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Roadholder oil-damped tele forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swinging arm, Girling twin shock **FRONT TYRE:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 4 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 55½in **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 6¼in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31in **WEIGHT:** 400lb **BRAKING:** 32 foot at 30mph **TOP SPEED:** 119mph when new

and a single coil with twin leads. He also took the opportunity to fit a tap to the oil line to prevent wet sumping. The chains were replaced, the heavy duty clutch stripped, cleaned and rebuilt, and the gearbox selector springs were replaced. Sandy also fitted a 2ls brake from an early Commando to give a bit more bite on the front. The Commando kick-start crank, which is cast with an offset, is another improvement. The electronic ignition also makes starting easy.

The Atlas had obviously enjoyed an easy life, having covered less than 10,000 miles in America. The clocks were reconditioned and the original mileage was added back on. Having pondered the Atlas's reputation, Sandy figured that gearing was the real problem behind any vibration. With a 22-tooth gearbox sprocket fitted, his Atlas now runs sweetly at 3000 to 3500rpm all day long. Cruising at 70 to 75mph causes no bad vibes whatsoever and the Atlas cheerfully returns close to 60mpg. The comfy new seat, combined with slightly higher bars gives a nice upright riding position making long runs a distinct pleasure.

Sandy sees his biggest potential problem may lie in the future when the time comes to replace the original, standard low compression pistons. These are no longer readily available so some owners fit Commando pistons instead, but these are higher compression and can cause problems. Running low compression pistons makes the Atlas tremendously torquey, much more so than the Commando which followed it. Sandy is obviously extremely happy with his under-rated Atlas and is justifiably delighted that it turned out to be significantly more than a mere crate filler. CBG

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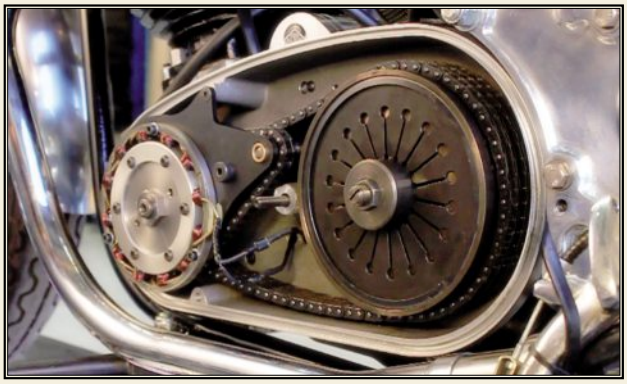

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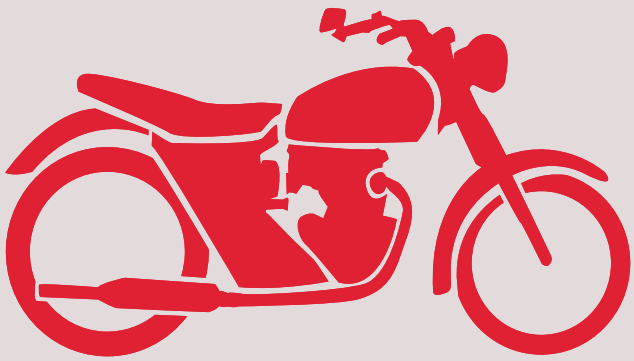

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WORDS & PHOTOS BY CHRIS ROOKE

Above: This is a 1974 Z1A, one of around 20,000 models manufactured. Each of the three early Zeds (Z1, Z1A and Z1B) were manufactured for a single year before the new Z900 (or KZ900 in America) came out in 1976

1: Considered a brawny bike for its time, the Big Zed doesn't look too broad by modern standards

2: The chain oil reservoir lives behind the left-hand cover

3: Kawasaki fitted lugs for a steering damper from the outset

4: Instrument binnacle with aftermarket clock, complete with a 'useful' key-holder above the ignition switch

5: Our featured machine has been upgraded with the optional factory extra of twin front discs. This was expensive originally but is an extremely useful modern modification. The right-hand fork leg was manufactured ready to take the second calliper so it's not a difficult upgrade, and improves the original marginal braking considerably. Later UK Z900s were fitted with twin discs as standard

WHEN HONDA'S CB750 arrived in 1968, despite all its technical advances, it wasn't really a rider's bike. However it opened the door for subsequent developments which, in 1972, came in the shape of the dohc Z1. Kawasaki's inline four was a massive improvement on the sohc CB750 and simply light years ahead of the British ohv-engined competition. Kawasaki, the well known two-stroke triple manufacturer had appeared, apparently from nowhere, with a four-cylinder four-stroke 900 complete with a five-speed gearbox, electric start and front disc brake – with twin discs an optional extra.

The development of the Z1 is the stuff of legend. In 1968 Kawasaki were ready to launch a bike that would shake the world; a four-cylinder four-stroke 750 developed in secret under the code name N600... but Honda beat them to it. Undeterred by this setback, Kawasaki chose not to launch their own multi-cylinder Superbike but to trump the Honda. The new project was codenamed 'New York Steak' because that was traditionally the best dish on the menu.

Kawasaki's engineers followed basic principles. The best engine: a four-carb double overhead cam 903cc motor with horizontally split crankcases. The best handling: a cradle frame similar to a Norton's Featherbed. The best appearance: traditional styling using the motto 'slim, sleek and sexy'. Technical innovations: these included exhaust gas emission recycling which reduced pollution by 40% and such futuristic touches as a rear brake light failure warning indicator (British bikes didn't even have neutral indicators at that stage).

After three years the new bike was ready and three were tested by being ridden 13,000 miles across America (disguised as CB750s – revenge!) with almost no problems apart from a high rate of chain and sprocket wear. The Z1 was unleashed in September 1972 and the rest is history. Cycle magazine compared it to the CB750 and immediately proclaimed: 'The King is dead. Long live the King!'

The Z1 claimed over 50 new speed and endurance records at Daytona in 1973 which helped cement its reputation – along with taking the title of fastest production bike in the world. Kawasaki sold 20,000 of their new 900s in the first year alone but only 38 of those came to the UK as the demand in America was so high.

The feature bike is a Z1A from 1974, the second year of manufacture, and has been imported from

Europe. Resplendent in its usual green and yellow, this bike has been refurbished and looks the part with its swooping lines, stacked silencers and rear cowling. So far so good. This bike starts on the button (literally) and soon settles into a pleasing burble without smoke or rattles. What, you mean you don't have to tickle the carbs first…?

Sitting astride, you immediately feel part of the bike and more like you are sitting in it, rather than on it – unlike the CB750. Those amazingly wide handlebars help control the beast and give the rider something to hang on to at speed. Zeds really do go like the clappers. Watch the race scene from the film 'Stone' on YouTube to see a Z1 doing battle with a Commando, both pulling wheelies at every opportunity.

A Z1 is utterly unlike a British bike. They are quite docile, quiet and easy to ride around town, despite their not inconsiderable weight at over 500lb, but they transform into a wild machine on the open road. It goes simply manic when you open the throttle: arm-wrenchingly, scream in your helmet, OMG manic. The acceleration is simply phenomenal. The Z1's gearbox is superb and clutchless changes are easy at any speed. The handling and suspension are OK for a bike of that era, which means they're pretty poor by today's standards, but on smooth tarmac it's fine.

Mechanically the engine is a real gem and they are pretty bulletproof, but rear chains and sprockets do wear out quite quickly, despite the provision of an ingenious gearbox-driven chain oiler hidden under the left-hand side cover. The brakes were only ever adequate by contemporary standards – certainly not up to the bike's 130mph potential in a world where everyone else has ABS. This bike has been upgraded to double front discs, made easier by Kawasaki making the right hand fork leg ready to accept a calliper.

The Z1 suffers from two other significant problems. The first is the handling. Although the frame was based on a Norton Featherbed design, the four-cylinder bike is significantly heavier than the old Brit twin. A Z1 produces over 80bhp of raw power and goes a lot faster than an old Norton. The result is frame flex leading to unsure handling in fast bends and massive weave at speeds over 100mph. Most 'classic' owners today won't really notice this problem, unless they still ride like they did when they

PRICE GUIDE
£15,000 to £25,000

FAULTS & FOIBLES
Chains and sprockets wear out quite quickly. Handling problems and straight line weave at speed. Paint flakes off barrels on early bikes. A big old lump to shove around at low speed

ALSO CONSIDER
Suzuki GT750: water-cooled and bulky but a sprightly and smooth two-stroke triple. Honda CB900: even more civilised than the Zed but a lot less ££. Kawasaki Mach IV H2: now that's really, truly manic…

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BUY IT NOW

RWHS have this 1974 Z1A up for grabs at £14,995. It's recently had the full Z-Power treatment with hydraulic clutch conversion and full floating AP twin discs. Has done less than 1000 miles since its rebuild. classicbikes.co.uk / 01630 657156

Above: Riders fell in love with them back then, and they fall in love with them today. The more fans there are, the higher the prices will climb

were 17. Kawasaki certainly noticed it and provided brackets to fit a steering damper from new. When a company supplies a steering damper as a standard factory option I think that says something.

However, the Z1's real problem is one of the reasons they were so derided back in the day by 'proper' riders of British iron. It's the noise, or rather the lack of it. Although the Kwacker sounds great, it is simply no substitute for the deafening thunder, bark and roar of a classic British machine. It is slightly too sanitised and smooth for its own good. Kawasaki deliberately designed it to be quiet. This is great, but when you ride a bike, you want to know you're riding a real bike, and you want others to know you're riding a proper motorcycle too. The sound and feel of the Kwacker is just a bit too 'nice'. If you ride this and then get on a Bonneville or Commando or Trident you'll immediately understand.

So here we have a slight conundrum. The Z1 is achingly beautiful. It's the result of a genuine blend of design, engineering, technology and ergonomics – painstakingly planned rather than individual elements thrown together. It's fast; really, really fast. It doesn't leak oil. It's 903ccs of four-cylinder four-carb four-pipe prowess. It just needs to be a bit more naughty than nice – especially considering the price you'll pay for one these days. CBG

ENGINE: air-cooled dohc four cylinder inline four-stroke **BORE / STROKE:** 66mm x 66mm **CAPACITY:** 903cc **COMPRESSION:** 8.5:1 **CARBURATION:** 4 x Mikuni VM 28SC 28mm **LUBRICATION:** Wet sump 4.0L capacity **POWER:** 82bhp @ 8500rpm **TORQUE:** 54.3 ft/lb @ 7000rpm **IGNITION:** contact breaker **TRANSMISSION:** wet multi plate clutch **GEARS:** five-speed **FRAME:** Steel tube twin loop **FRONT SUSPENSION:** 35mm tele forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** swinging arm, twin shock **FRONT WHEEL:** 3.25 x 19 **REAR WHEEL:** 4.00 x 18 **FRONT BRAKE:** 297mm disc, floating calliper **REAR BRAKE:** 198mm sls drum **WHEELBASE:** 1490mm **WEIGHT:** 230kg dry **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31½ inches **BRAKING:** 29ft from 30mph **ACCELERATION:** 0-60mph 4.8 seconds **TOP SPEED:** 130mph

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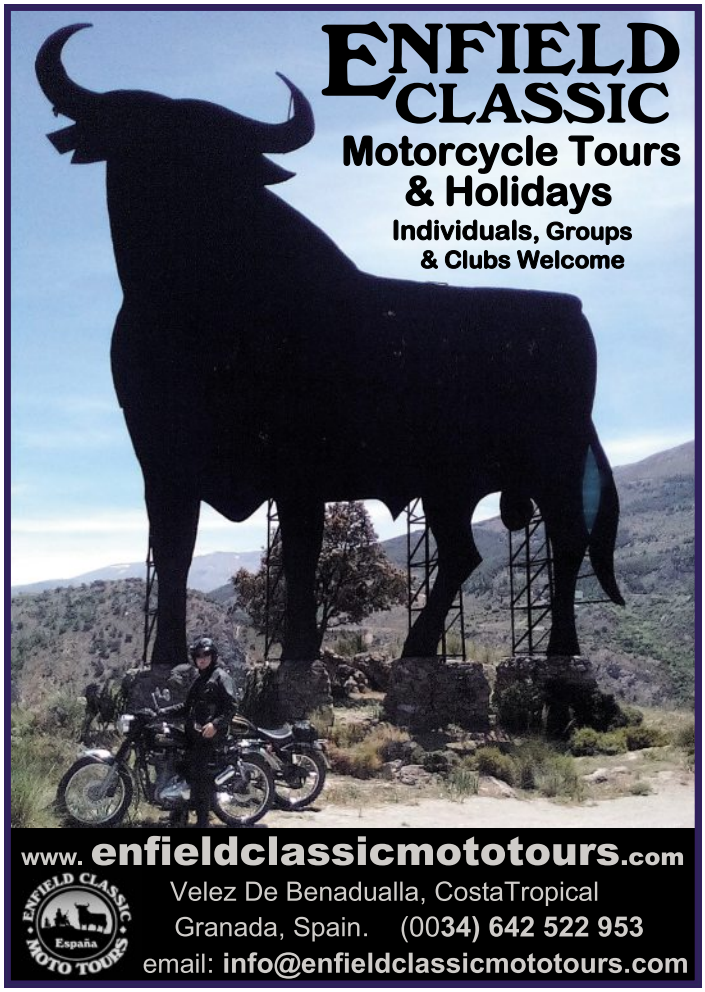

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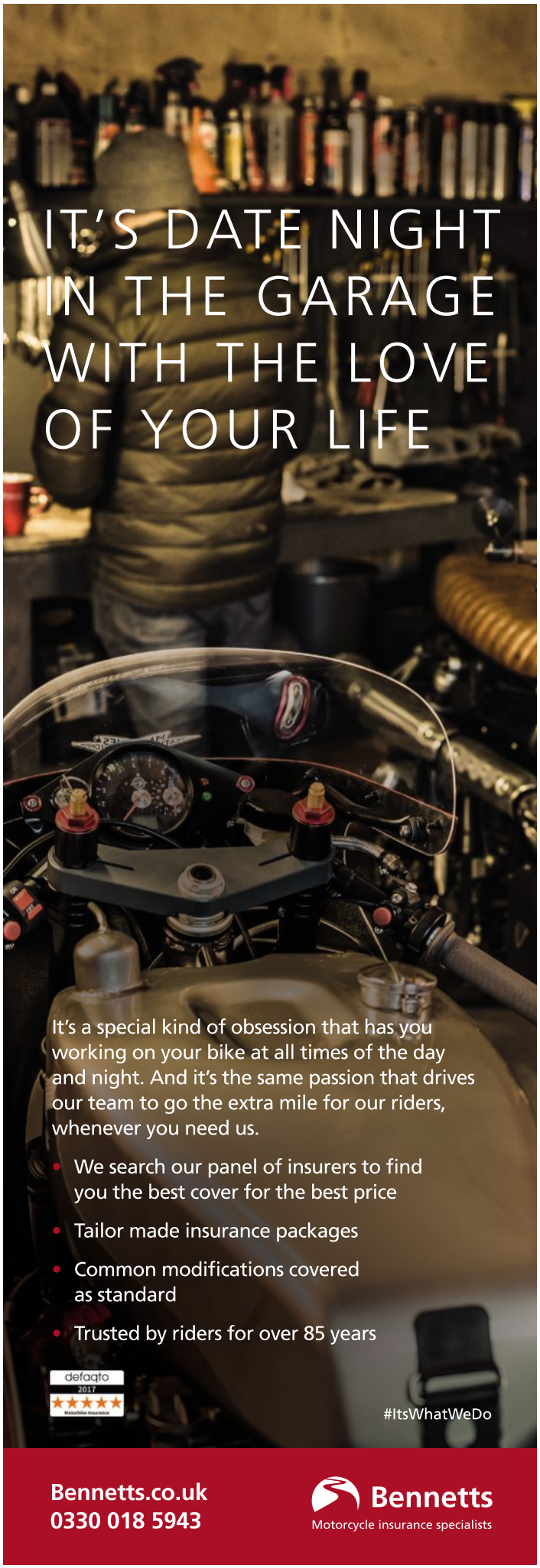

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Special T

Bonneville specials are trending, so we're told. Here's a really rather special special

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

Above: When the oily-frame was introduced for 1971, the need to build specials was over. Or maybe all subsequent 650-up Triumph twins were already TriBSAs. Discuss…

1: Splayed unfiltered carbs, complete with sweet bellmouths and a clear pass for those fast gasses heading for a fiery time inside the cylinder

2: The engine that launched 1000 specials. Neat, compact, quick, and hardly leaky or rattly at all. Ever

3: The eagle-eyed will have spotted that the tank's from a Hinckley Bonnie, suitably cut away to clear the oily frame's oil filler

4: Those special bends. The kick-start's kicked out to clear the swept-back exhaust, while the gearlever gets away with simply being reversed

5: Triumph forks from this time work well, though the stanchions can rust easily. The conical hub 2ls stopper is occasionally… characterful

THERE WAS A TIME when, if you were looking for a bike to build a special out of, it was to the Triumph range you headed off to. Tritons and Tribsas had the ubiquitous Triumph twin engine in both unit and pre-unit forms as their power plant. Later on, multiple frame builders took on the engine and propelled it to new and highly tuned heights. Thousands of chopper, bobber and flat-tracker builders hacked up frames to create machines that ranged from the sublime to the completely ridiculous.

Triumph's engine is one of the best-looking power plants ever made, and it's not surprising that it has become the focus of so much special building. These days anyone who hacks up a pre-1970 Triumph Twin to build a special risks being viewed as a social pariah, but those modifying the much-maligned Oil In Frame (OIF) Triumph Twin from the 1970s and 80s are subject to less approbation.

From 1971 to 1988 the oil-bearing frame, originally designed to house BSA rather than Triumph engines, was the home to the iconic twin. For much of that time Meriden and the later Harris Triumphs were pretty much the only British motorcycles you could buy, and certainly the only mass-market machines. Triumph made thousands of them. There were export and UK spec Bonnevilles and Tigers, with engines from the early 650 to the expanded 750 and, eventually, electric starts and four-valve heads. There were police Saints, Thunderbird TR65s and Tiger Trails, Executives and Silver Jubilee and Royal Wedding Specials, all powered by the same basic unit, and all in the same frame.

The 750 Bonneville was the *MCN* bike of the year in 1979, splitting a run of big Kawasaki fours, and while this was possibly driven by blind patriotism, the late T140D Bonneville Special was an undeniably attractive machine. More significantly, the Triumph twin was a lot cheaper than its Japanese competitors at the time. In 1979, a new Bonneville cost £1011, while a Suzuki GS750 was £1375 and a Honda CX500 £1195. And even then, Triumphs were

2

3

4

5

heavily discounted. The net result was that lots of OIF Triumphs were sold and there are still many broken ones languishing in garden sheds, the back of garages and in US outhouses. In turn, this means that building a special out of a 1970s OIF Triumph isn't the crime against originality that doing the same to a coveted 1960s model might be.

The big problem for special builders is the thing that makes the OIF Triumph what it is, the frame. The drainpipe-thick oil bearing frame tube that forms the backbone of the bike can't be mucked about with too much. Triumph themselves did manage to drop the seat loop from its original towering 34in to a more manageable 32, and careful skilled modifications to the subframe, swinging arm and suspension can improve things further. The frame is pretty tall for the average rider, and doesn't lend itself well to chopping, hard tailing or café racering, though plenty have tried, with varying degrees of success. The OIF design has a filter in an inaccessible spot just behind and below the engine where it can leak, especially in the hands of owners carrying out kerbside maintenance in the cash-strapped days when the beasts rolled out from Meriden. The early OIF bikes themselves were of variable quality, hence the number now languishing in sheds.

You could, if well-heeled, pop along to Rickman and pick up a brand new custom-built frame, or buy a Hyde Harrier that is reputed to propel the twin to 130mph, but that was and is the expensive option, and what you had at the end wouldn't really be a Triumph, it would be something much more special. But if you are prepared to make the effort you can build a very tidy special out of an OIF Bonneville.

A whole industry has built up around building Bonneville specials and aftermarket goodies are easy to get your hands on. One advantage of the factory not having any money to spend on development

PRICE GUIDE

£3500-£10,000

FAULTS AND FOIBLES

Bonneville engines are robust but watch out for overtuning and cracked heads. Frame cracking near the centrestand mount and oil leaks from the frame near the oil filter were early issues and bodges by unsympathetic previous owners are common. Pay close attention to engine and frame numbers – an original engine should have Triumph embossed behind the engine number. Not a great bike for the short of stature

ALSO CONSIDER

The 71-72 BSA A65 Lightning is the bike the frame was designed for and has a similar twin carb pushrod twin engine. The Royal Enfield Interceptor 2 is considered by many to be the pinnacle of British twin development, and Norton's Commando has a more sophisticated feel

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BUY IT NOW

This bike is for sale for £9000. Delivery can be arranged. Contact Mike Ives on 01924 406135 or visit mikeivesmotorcycles.co.uk

Above: It's impossible to list all the reasons for buying a Bonneville. Never ridden one? Try it. Then decide how much you want to make it all your own: easy to work on, affordable and with very many special bits for added individuality

meant OIF Triumphs didn't change as much as their Japanese contemporaries.

You'll be very lucky and very talented if you can build an OIF Triumph special as good as the one featured here. This is a very special Bonneville build made by builder Vagn Jensen in Denmark – who has a stream of classic specials and restorations under his belt, going back 40 years. Mike from Mike Ives Motorcycles uses Vagn for many of the restorations he sells from his classic dealership in West Yorkshire.

MANUFACTURED: 1971-1973 **ENGINE:** 649cc twin carb OHV parallel twin **BORE/STROKE:** 71mm X 82mm **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9:1 **POWER:** 49bhp @ 6200rpm **TRANSMISSION:** Five-speed; multiplate wet clutch **FRAME:** Steel tube oil bearing double cradle **SUSPENSION:** Front: Telescopic fork, Rear: Twin shocks with adjustable preload **BRAKES:** Front: 8in conical hub drum, Rear: 7in conical hub drum **LENGTH:** 87.4in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32in **WEIGHT:** 384lb (dry) **FUEL CAPACITY:** 2.9gallon **TOP SPEED:** 110mph

The café racer is based on a 1972 T120V – the V indicating that the original owner had opted for the optional five-speed gearbox over the four-speed standard model.

Swept back but tucked in pipes, more commonly seen on Tritons, run into very free breathing and throaty megaphones. To allow the gearshift to clear the pipes and the use of rearsets, the gearshift is reversed, resulting in a right-handed, one-up, four-down shift – which would be confusing to anyone used to modern gearboxes, but less so for those whose biking origins were in the Fifties and Sixties, when this was more common. The rearsets are mounted on the swinging arm plates, with the right-hand side peg flipping up to clear the modified kick-start. A pair of Wassell carbs similar to Amal Mk1 Concentrics sit on splayed inlets and squirt the fuel in, with the bellmouths in tidy side panel cut-outs. The tank is a Triumph item – not from an OIF T120, but a modified item from a Hinckley Bonneville with a cut-out to allow access to the oil filler.

Ace bars point the bike in the right direction and alloy rims are laced into a pair of conical hub brakes, as fitted to 1972 Bonnevilles and Tigers, to stop the plot. Switchgear is minimal, with just a dipswitch and horn button on the bars. There are period bent wire headlamp brackets and replica Sixties clocks to give you all the required information.

Every part has been gone over and all the nuts and bolts are new stainless or zinc-plated originals. Like many a great special, this Danish delight has the double take appeal – it takes a second look to see just how clever all the modifications are. CBG

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WORDS & PHOTOS BY MARION THIRSK

Above: The engine runs well and is oil-tight, so owner Jock is reluctant to separate it just to clean the head up. The faded saddle was treated to restore some colour. Still on its original springs, Jock says it's very comfortable

1: Conventional single-spring girder forks up front: neat quality links, too

2: The oil can sits on its original bracket: it just needs cable ties to make sure it doesn't get lost. Simple side valve mechanism lives in the valve chest. And don't you love 'Garage Poets'?

SAROLEA ARE KNOWN today for their electric motorcycles while the original factory's motorcycles, manufactured from the early 1900s, are rarely encountered. In a similar fashion to BSA, the original Sarolea company began life as an arms manufacturer in 1850 at Herstal in Belgium. In 1892 they began manufacturing Royale Saroléa bicycles, adding a 1½hp 239cc engine to create their first motorcycle in 1901. Sarolea-engined tri-kar tricycles and motor bicycles were sold in Britain, initially by the East London Rubber Company under the Kerry brand with ladies and gents models. Engines were also supplied to other manufacturers.

V-twin engines were introduced in 1905, a 5hp 616cc and 6hp 726cc model, both capable of 50mph. Production had grown so much by 1907 that Sarolea had a 200-strong workforce. By 1912 it had sold over 10,000 machines, claiming a heady mix of maximum power and incomparable comfort with their 3½hp 500cc side valve single.

Sarolea used several British components, including Amal carburettors, Miller headlamps and points, and Sturmey Archer gearboxes until they started manufacturing their own gearboxes. From the outset Sarolea competed successfully in many forms of racing, including endurance and hill climbs, which obviously encouraged sales – and by 1929 some 75 machines were being produced each day.

During 1930 the model number changed to reflect the year of manufacture, so the 32 A was the 350 side valve Model A of 1932, the model AS followed from 1938 to 1940, continuing postwar until 1950, with telescopic forks introduced in 1948. A lightweight 147cc two-stroke was introduced in 1932, followed by a 175cc two-stroke. In the 1930s Sarolea offered a variety of 350cc, 500cc and 600cc side valve touring models, and overhead valve Supersport machines, plus sidecar and racing options. 1938 saw 19 models available, ranging from a 122cc two-stroke to a now incredibly rare 973cc boxer engine sidecar model.

A year ago Jock was in Belgium and spotted our featured Sarolea parked outside an antique shop. His grandson Cameron liked it, so they went in and agreed to buy it. The dealer refused a deposit and kept it for several weeks while Jock arranged his

return to transport it home. When Jock returned and started loading the bike, four cars screeched to a halt outside. Surrounding him the drivers told him how lucky he was, as they'd all tried unsuccessfully to tempt the dealer with cash after the sale had been agreed. The Sarolea caused quite a stir on the ferry too, with the stewards inundated by people wanting to go down to the car deck and see it.

When purchased, the paintwork looked okay from a distance, but the tank was suffering the ravages of time, so it was stripped, rubbed down and professionally resprayed. This consequently made the other components look a bit tired, so the mudguards and rack were resprayed, with Jock insisting that any bashes and dents were retained, as they are part of the life story of the machine. He wanted everything left 'as is' rather than looking like it had just left the factory. The blue and white logo originally on the tank was okay, but the marque's gold logo is more typically seen on most bikes, so Jock chose this for the finish.

Jock found very few Sarolea leaflets or documents available, with anything for sale online commanding ridiculously high premiums, so some degree of guesswork was involved. The story of this particular machine suggests that during the Second World War, when Belgium was invaded, the original owner filled a leather pannier and headed off to Switzerland rather than surrender his bike.

When Jock bought the bike the dealer told him he'd need a new battery. Jock duly bought one but then an auto-electrician friend suggested trying the original battery on a trickle charge. Checking after a month or so the battery showed 3 volts, so it was left to charge a bit longer and is now fully charged showing over 6 volts. Perhaps the longevity of the battery can be explained by its manufacturer, Hagen, which made batteries for military purposes. Unfortunately, over time, the battery had leaked, causing damage to the brake rod etc, so the rod has been replaced, like for like, with what was on the bike. Very little else has been replaced; it's all just polished up so it gleams in the sun with the Sarolea name and S logo emblazoned all over the casings.

The rather unusual horizontal Amal carb was leaking when bought. Jock tried to source a new float chamber but couldn't. Thankfully, it just needed a wee rub down and clean. A few wires had gone brittle so were replaced and the headlight switch wasn't

PRICE GUIDE
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FAULTS & FOIBLES
Components and information very hard to obtain and info needs translating, but period British spares can be used as substitutes

ALSO CONSIDER
British side valve singles more plentiful and easier to maintain, like the BSA B23 or Triumph 3S/3SC/3SW 350s. For Continental chic, try the BMW/EMW R35 rugged shaft-drive singles

SPECIALIST INFO
sarolea.cz

3: Sarolea were famous for their big 500 and 600 singles. There are fewer 350s available and they are rarely seen in Britain. Observe the unusual horizontal Amal carb, too

4: Handsome original and early VDO speedo shows genuine mileage – and yes, that's original paint on the mounting bracket

BUY IT NOW

If you're determined to own a Sarolea then you'll probably need to go shopping in EuroLand to find one. This 1929 350 sidevalve single is from the previous generation to our feature bike. It's an older restoration, up for €8950 at Yesterdays in the Netherlands

Above: Interesting to see the very AMC-style pressed steel primary chaincase, complete with the rear brake pivot in the centre. Practical, affordable and totally characterful. Recommended

working. This took Jock and his auto-electrician friend days to figure out. While stripping the switch they took lots of photos to assist with reassembly but didn't consider that it might have been reassembled incorrectly by the previous owner. After a lot of frustration they eventually had to walk away and have a break from it. Later, upon turning the headlamp upside down, everything just fell together!

The light fitting is Bakelite with brass lines at different heights. All the terminals are different heights, so when you turn the switch the sidelight comes on, then the dip and then the headlight. The single bulb has two filaments, so the dip and headlight are both on at same time. The tail-light was also coaxed back into life, but the Sarolea doesn't sport a horn or brake light as these were optional extras.

The steering bearings were greased and repacked, then Jock painted the chainguard and foot pedals. When the wheel rims were painted, Cameron and Jock removed the spokes and cleaned them up, rather than replace them. Everything is original, apart from the front tyre. The Englebert back tyre is no longer roadworthy but is retained as a nice period feature for shows and it is easily swapped over for road use.

The back brake is quite good but the front brake, barely an inch wide, is not very effective. In 1936 the 350 side valve changed from a hand gearchange with a three-speed gearbox, to a foot-change four-speed gearbox. The gear pedal pivots in the middle, so you go down on the toe, then back up with the heel. The single piece kick-start doesn't fold in, but thankfully the engine doesn't kick back and the rear footrests sit neatly out of the way when not in use, swivelling down into position when required. The pillion seat bolts onto the rear carrier should you need it.

On the road, the Sarolea offers a distinctly vintage experience. Handling on the straight is fine but you need to anticipate and plan ahead, especially for braking. Coming from a modern Honda Pan European, Jock took a bit of time to acclimatise. The first time he took the bike out he came to a corner and thought: "I'm not going to make it, this bike's flying." Happily, he did make it and returning home his friend, who'd been following, said: "I've got you on film. That was some corner, eh? It's just a pity you didn't get that wee bit extra, because you would have got it up to 40mph…"

Jock confirms that the Sarolea is a thoroughly enjoyable bike to own and ride. By the time you read this it will have changed hands again as a birthday surprise for Cameron, who has polished and looked after it so well. CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1932 to 1950 (A and AS models) **ENGINE:** Four-stroke side valve single **BORE / STROKE:** 75 x 79mm **CAPACITY:** 349cc **POWER:** 10bhp **CARBURETTOR:** Amal semi-automatic **IGNITION:** Bosch magneto **LIGHTING:** Miller headlamp **CLUTCH:** Dry clutch **GEARBOX:** Four-speed hand or foot change **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Chain **FINAL DRIVE:** Chain **BRAKES:** 180mm drums **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Girder forks **FRONT TYRE:** 350 x 19 **REAR TYRE:** 350 x 19 **WHEELBASE:** 59in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 27¾in **WEIGHT:** 125kg **TOP SPEED:** 55mph

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All the fun of the Four

The fabled CB400F had a smaller sibling. Not everybody knows that

WORDS BY OLIVER HULME **PHOTOS BY** 2WHEELSMIKLOS

IF THERE'S ONE Honda motorcycle that British bikers took to their hearts in the 1970s it was the relatively short-lived but adored CB400 Four. What most European motorcyclists did not know was that two years before, while Honda were selling their CB350 twins to us, they had begun selling the CB400 Four's predecessor, the CB350 Four, across the rest of the world.

Perhaps Honda were not initially convinced that European buyers would get the idea of a small capacity four, which seems unlikely, or maybe they had a stack of twins they wanted to get rid of first. For whatever reason, while we didn't see the CB350F in our showrooms, the Americans snapped them up – they were the cheapest mass market four you could lay your hands on. Despite the mechanical sophistication, the 350F was slower than its sister twins and appealed to those who wanted a machine that had both a visual and technical impact as much as performance.

As the stock of restorable 400 Fours in the UK runs out, a trickle of 350 Fours is arriving on these shores. This particular CB350F was restored at 2WheelsMiklos in Guildford, Surrey. Mike Salamon has the bike in his personal collection. He said: "My first experience of any Honda Four was a 350 in Johannesburg in the early 1970s. It left a mark on me and I had always hankered after getting one. The limited production and sales run did not make this easy. Eventually I came across an unregistered US barn find on eBay. It was not running and was quite shabby, however, it all appeared to be there apart from the exhausts. I won the auction and a week later had a very sorry specimen in my workshop."

1

Above: Before they became universal, small fours were rather rare. And they still are. Eminently practical, comfortable and charming. Faster than a G3 Matchless, apparently

1: Classic Honda architecture: four pots, four pipes, four carbs and a single camshaft. Also a kick-start for those bleak midnight click moments

2: Was this the last NOS 350F zorst in the world? Be careful of the oil filter, it's too easy to round off the head of the mounting bolt

3: Classic Honda clocks. The view ahead remarkably resembles that from the seats of the bigger fours

4: It takes dedication, patience and perseverance to restore the under-seat zone to original. Most of us don't even try, now do we?

2

3

4

BUY IT NOW

CB350 Fours come up on the market occasionally. Oxford Classic Honda have this UK registered and restored example on sale at £3250. Call 01865 326358

PRICE GUIDE

£1000 for a restoration project, to £4000

FAULTS & FOIBLES

The single downtube frame should be checked for corrosion at the base where it splits into two to form the engine cradle as it can be a rust trap. Camchains can slip out of adjustment and the camchain adjuster is prone to seizure and snapping. Primary chain tensioners can fail. The front brake caliper needs regular attention. The oil filter bolt can round off easily, and over-tightening will crack the housing. Exhausts are prone to rot.

ALSO CONSIDER

The Honda CB400 Four is more plentiful than the 350 and has better spares availability, while the 500 Four is tougher. Honda's 350 twins are faster and more substantial but less glamorous. Kawasaki KH400 triples and Yamaha RD350s are great for those requiring a sportier edge, while the Suzuki GT380 makes a good touring two-stroke, and Benelli produced the 350 Quattro, virtually a carbon copy of the Honda engine, for those with Italian taste buds.

OWNERS' CLUBS

Honda SOHC Owners' Club www.sohc4.net
Honda Owners' Club GB www.hoc.org.uk
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The 350 has a SOHC four cylinder across the frame engine comprising tiny cylinders (47 x 50mm) fed by four 20mm Keihin carbs. Dry weight is some 170kg and top speed is just under 100mph. The Four is, like the later 400, high revving and very smooth.

The powerplant sits in a single-downtube steel cradle frame featuring dual shocks acting on a traditional swinging arm at the rear. Telescopic forks hold an 18-inch wheel and a single 10-inch stainless steel disc between their legs with Honda's single-piston floating caliper. Rear wheel diameter is the same as the front, and the rim is laced to a hub with a six-inch drum brake.

The bodywork package was far more suited to the US market than the later 400. It has a more traditional Honda look to the tank and side panels and a 4-into-4 exhaust system. Torn between wanting the 350 to have a big visual impact and trying to keep the weight down, Honda used the thinnest steel they could get away with to make the silencers, with the result that the system only weighed about 25lb but was destined to rot away very quickly indeed.

Anyone who has restored a dog-eared 1970s Japanese motorcycle will tell the same tale. The cost of the parts almost always exceeds the cost of the bike in the first place.

It soon transpired that a lot needed doing to this 350 and that far more was missing than was originally thought. The difficult items included the 4-into-4 pipes, and 350 Four as opposed to 350 Twin forks. A wiring harness was needed, as were airbox internals and smoothly working carb/throttle linkages – without which setting up the four carbs would be almost impossible. In addition, the bike would need handlebars, grabrail, a seat, a number of the levers, decals and badges, cables, brake lines, fuel lines, mirrors and indicators, light lenses, front and rear wheels and tyres, shocks, brake pads and shoes, battery and ignition switch. David Silver supplied an electronic ignition to replace the factory points and this was fitted, together with new coils. Mike estimates that the parts cost three times the original purchase price of the 350.

Above: It sometimes seems remarkable that the 400, with its strange single silencer system, became iconic, while the 350's four-pipe splendour was less so. Practical, and fun. But not cheap…

There are three good spares resources for classic Hondas: David Silver in the UK, Consolidated Motor Spares in Holland and eBay – with eBay USA particularly useful for bikes which were not released in Europe. Eventually all the key parts were assembled – including the last set of NOS forks from CMS; a re-manufactured set of 4-into-4 pipes, also from CMS; and used airbox and carb parts from eBay USA.

With everything collected the bike was stripped, labelled and bagged. The frame was sandblasted and the wheels sent off to be rebuilt by Hagon's Wheel Department using vapour blasted hubs, new chrome rims from David Silver and stainless steel spokes. The frame and cycle parts were painted gloss black and the body work Candy Bacchus Olive Green (the 350 appeared in red, green and black). Paint by Cycle Sprays in Cranleigh. The barrels were sandblasted and the engine cases and rocker covers polished. The engine was rebuilt with new gaskets and bolts, but the mileage was only some 15,000, so engine and gearbox internals were in good shape.

The build went well. The most challenging part was building a set of working carbs and then tuning them…

Mike says: "With the benefit of the new wiring and the electronic ignition we got the bike really well tuned. It revs freely all the way and pulls strongly in each gear. Always a good test is the last two miles up the A3 North from Portsmouth into Guildford. It is steep; but despite this the 350 was still accelerating at 70mph in fifth as I came to the crest of the hill. Not bad for a 45-year-old 350."

The 350 Four only lasted a few years on US dealers' floors before being replaced by the 400 Four, which in turn was ditched, to considerable outrage from buyers, for the CB400T Dream twin which was lighter, faster and better handling but did not have the glamour and visual appeal. It was also cheaper to build: a 400 four engine costs almost the same as a 750 four to make.

Using the VJMCC dating service, Mike was able to get an age-related 1973 plate. He says: "The bike receives a lot of positive attention wherever it goes and is a real pleasure to ride. Looks like Honda got it right!" CBG

MANUFACTURED: 1972-1974 **ENGINE:** 347cc single overhead cam four-stroke **BORE/STROKE:** 47 × 50mm **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9.3:1 **POWER:** 34bhp at 10,000rpm **IGNITION:** Coil and points **TRANSMISSION:** five-speed **SUSPENSION:** Telescopic front fork, twin shocks and adjustable preload rear **BRAKES:** Single 10-inch disc front, six-inch SLS drum rear **TYRES FRONT:** 3.00 x 18, **TYRES REAR:** 3.50 x 18 **WHEELBASE:** 53.3 inches **SEAT HEIGHT:** 31 inches **WEIGHT:** 373lb (dry) **FUEL CAPACITY:** 2.7 gallons **FUEL CONSUMPTION:** 40-60mpg **TOP SPEED:** 98mph

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RIDINGLIFE

CHROME-PLATED CONNIE

YOUR LAST EDITORIAL significantly caught my eye as I found myself in a similar position three years ago when I was offered an Enfield basket case which needed major TLC. It looked like it required a significant investment of time and money.

However, along with many teenage Brits from the 1950s, this model was the one I lusted after but could never afford – hence the attraction. There was a Constellation that was frequently ridden down Clapham Park Road outside my parents' flat, and it always looked and sounded just right.

I purchased the basket case with its matching engine and frame numbers, but the gearbox was from another bike. I contacted the REOC and was advised that it was one of ten which were shipped to Canada in 1959. There was one curious anomaly with my purchase: a chromed frame and swinging arm, which you may be able to see in the pic. Someone went to a lot of time and trouble to do this and, although my first intention was to have them stripped and powdercoated black, I changed my mind as it was a part of the mystery and history of this bike.

Restoring the Constellation was a lot of fun. Hitchcocks were marvellous for parts and advice. It is as close to original spec as I could make it, chrome frame excepted, 10 TT9 carb, etc.

If *CBG* continues to deliver the content I have seen so far, it is going to be a great monthly read on the west coast of Canada.

Tony Cording

So many of the exported ancient Brits vary from both the catalogue and the home market spec that it really is wise to consult with Those Who Know. In any case, the chrome frame does look remarkable. ***CBG***

SETTING THE SEELEY RECORD STRAIGHT

THE PHIL READ / Honda Britain replicas were based on the F2 model, and not the F1 as mentioned in the Seeley Honda 750 article. That's why they have ComStar wheels, as this was the first model to use them. All the surplus parts came to the Honda dealer I worked at back then. So both my CB250RS machines have F2 headlights fitted and one has a slightly cut-down set of F2 handlebars – the bars were free, thanks to the boss. We had so many of them they were unlikely to all sell!

I think there were maybe two or three F1 tanks and seats among the parts, so just possibly a few were used. It seems more likely though that maybe those were left over from the six Seeley Hondas made by the man himself.

Michael Durrant

THE DEPENDABLE DUMPLING

PHIL MATHER DESCRIBES the BSA A65 as a 'polychromatic blue dumpling'. I have owned this particular bike for the last 53 years and have found it very reliable. It is in bits at the moment for only the second time in all those!

Do you by any chance have a photograph of it at the 1962 Earls Court Show as I haven't been able to obtain one.

Bill Julier

We don't appear to have the A65 at Earls Court image in the archive, but maybe a reader does? We do have a shot of one of the 1962 press machines, however, complete with the original 1962 oily sheet. ***CBG***

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MYTH-BUSTING

WHAT IS IT with the English and Hondas? Here in Oz, all I ever hear from the Brits in the pub and letters in magazines is 'the usual excellent Honda quality' or 'legendary Honda reliability' or 'fabulous Honda engineering design'. Sorry, but it's a load of hogwash and I reckon you've all been brainwashed!

I have a modicum of experience with bikes. I started riding at 13 and am now approaching 60. The photos show a recent rebuild I rode in the Distinguished Gentlemen's Ride, a Triumph Adventurer, and my current bike is a Thunderbird Storm. I've owned over 25 bikes including Triumphs, Kawasakis, Suzukis, Lambrettas and a CZ/Jawa. I rode just about everything else when I worked for Pantera in the late 1970s, making mounting brackets and fitting fairings. That's where I first started to develop quite an intense dislike of Hondas, and here's why:

Google 'endemic Honda camchain tensioner issues' and see how many pages come up

Honda are the only manufacturer here in Oz (and most other places outside the UK) with a reputation for making crankcases and engine components from cheese. The threads strip with ease

Honda were one of the first manufacturers to run the camshafts straight in the head, so that when a bearing picks up you have to throw away the head instead of fitting new bearings

The only manufacturer (to my knowledge) to put inboard disc brakes on a motorcycle

Honda camshafts turn to chocolate

The only bike on which I have ever bent the valves

When you break a gear lever return spring on a CX500 it costs $3 for the spring… and $5000 for the engine and gearbox rebuild to fit it

The 900 Bol'Dor – the only bike I've ever seen with 'bog' up the front of the cylinder block where the chain came through

The CX500 and CX650 Turbo are among the ugliest bikes ever made, with the CBX as a close second

Comstar wheels – so ugly I wouldn't put 'em on a Billy cart!

Other than that I really enjoy the magazine.

Ian Poole

Almost every manufacturer makes a few mistakes, surely? And one of the common criticisms of the original British industry was its failure to innovate and experiment in the face of rising competition from overseas. Discuss… ***CBG***

BITTEN BY A BULLET

I REALLY APPRECIATED the article on the carburettor Indian Enfield Bullets. I believe that you got it all pretty much correct. Part of their appeal obviously is their ubiquity; no ridiculous notions of buying for investment here yet, and long may it remain so. I bought my 2007 Classic 350 from Haywards in Cambridge (total stars) ten years ago. I am consistently charmed by its manner of going, especially after a programme of mild weight reduction coupled with the almost obligatory tweaks to exhaust arrangements and carb jetting. I seem to be the only person who has kept the original Indian Mikarb which works just fine.

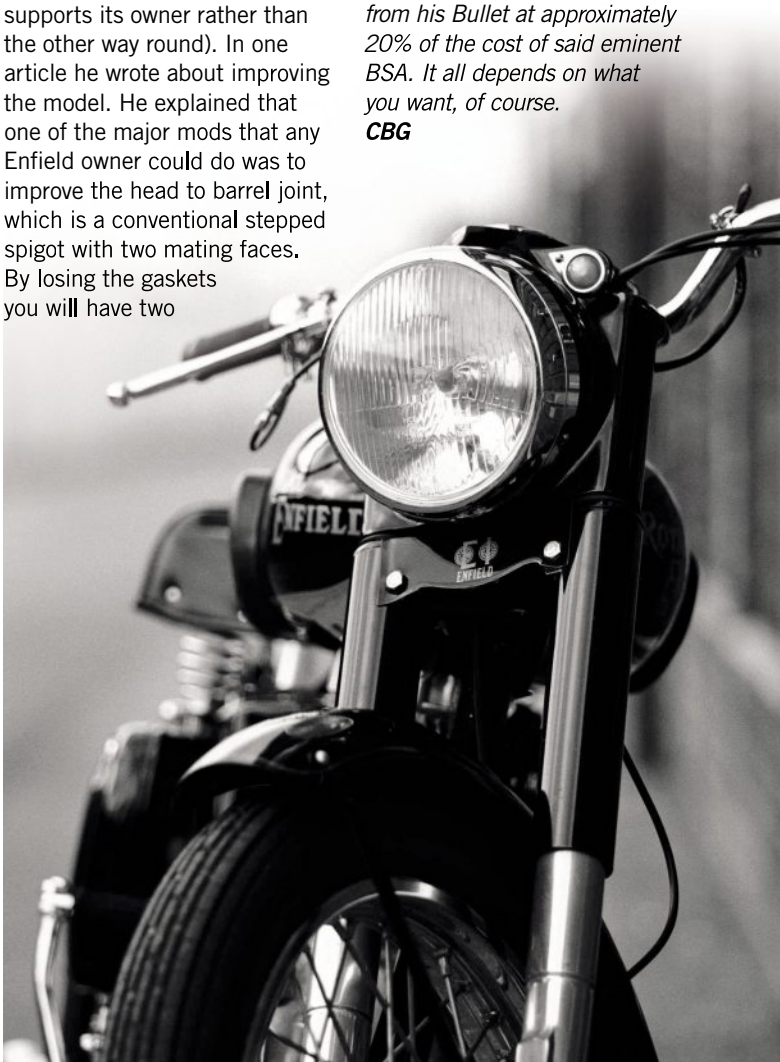
Older readers may remember Royce Creasey who used to write in the mid to late 1970s, championing the cheap alternative biking scene. Royce wrote lyrically about his Velo Venom (bought for £20 as a pile of parts) but concluded that the next best thing to assume the title of a 'working motorcycle' was the humble Enfield Bullet. The definition of a 'working motorcycle' is a bike that supports its owner rather than the other way round). In one article he wrote about improving the model. He explained that one of the major mods that any Enfield owner could do was to improve the head to barrel joint, which is a conventional stepped spigot with two mating faces. By losing the gaskets you will have two faces that should fit together reasonably well.

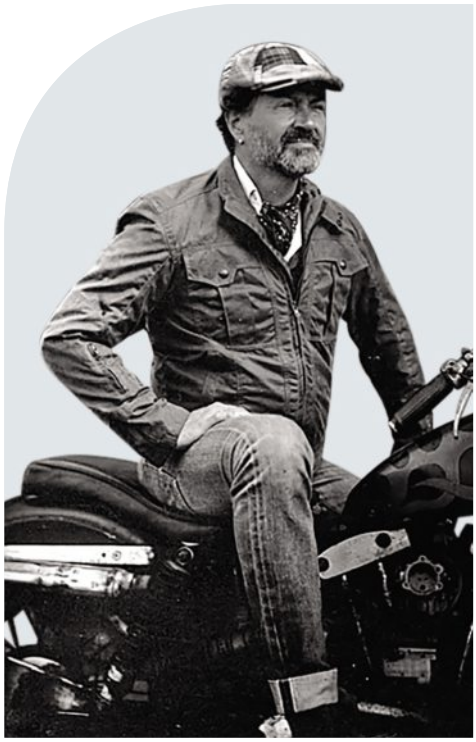
As Royce pointed out, ideally you need the inner ring to fit together and the outer ring to have a very small clearance. This may require some light machining and then finishing by hand, using grinding paste in the manner of lapping in a valve seat. In one move you will have a gas-tight seal, better heat transfer from head to barrel and no more oil leaks from the pushrod tunnels. You will also get a slight rise in compression ratio which means shortening the pushrods (easily done as they are adjustable, otherwise Hitchcocks will sell you shorter ones).

It was this mod alone that made the most difference to my humble Bullet's performance. This, together with the other various tweaks, has turned my little 350 from a 55mph plodder into a 65mph plodder. A proper B-road blaster. Now all we need are some long days of warm summer sun!

Phil Holloway

We have a friend who has extracted 'Gold Star' performance from his Bullet at approximately 20% of the cost of said eminent BSA. It all depends on what you want, of course.
CBG





PAUL D'ORLÉANS

The consensus

A victory for dirt

TO EVERY THING there is a season, and May sees a flowering of motorcycle shows around the world, rather inconveniently timed if you ask me. This year Vintage Revival Montlhéry, the bi-annual pre-1940 car and motorcycle autodrome circus, landed right on the Quail Motorcycle Gathering in Carmel, CA, which I've emceed for 7 years. Sod it, I'd rather see French clunkers thundering around the most historic race circuit on the planet, than talk about bikes sitting on a lawn. But everything takes a back seat to my gig as a judge at the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este. It's the shining star of the car show firmament, so being involved in the concorso di moto is more than a little flattering.

At the Concorso, six judges from around the world (from the USA to the Czech Republic anyway) look over the 30 assembled bikes on Saturday at the Villa Erba, which neighbours the swank Renaissance hotel, Villa d'Este. That's where the cars are parked, on the expansive gravel terrace of the grand old villa, which has one of the only intact Renaissance gardens in Italy. We're shuttled by Riva from one Villa to the next, which affords a moment to reflect on how damned lucky we are to be there; nothing compares to this location. Visiting the car half of the event, I was thrilled to discover an interloper among the four-wheeled swells at Villa d'Este, Count 'Jonny' Lurani's 1935 miniature streamliner, called the Nibbio. Lurani was a journalist, engineer, constructor and racer, the type of romantic fellow we don't see so much these days (although Alain de Cadanet is still around for comparison).

Lurani's Nibbio was originally powered by a Moto Guzzi factory racing 'Bicylindrica' engine, a 90-degree OHC V-twin, and with this power plant was the first car to reach 100mph using a 500cc motor. Not your grandfather's Cinquecento at all! Stanley Woods won the Isle of Man TT that year on a Bicylindrica motorcycle, "perhaps with the same motor as the Nibbio" said Federico Göttsche Bebert, Lurani's grandson, who presented the car. "The original Moto Guzzi engine was only on loan," so now it used a Falcone engine for shows. Clearly, the Nibbio has the heart and soul of a motorcycle – how did it sneak into the Concorso? Federico put a finger to his lips, but smiled. Saturday night, the Nibbio was awarded the Coppa d'Oro, for people's choice; clearly, the people (actually, the guests of the Concorso) have good taste.

BMW owns the Concorso, and this year's theme was 'Around the World in 80 Days', after the Jules Verne novel. It was published in 1873, coincidentally the year Villa d'Este opened as a hotel. Strangely, none of the fantastic early Round-The-World cars was presented, only the usual sorts of automotive incredibilia… but the Concorso di Moto had two original-paint world travellers. Journalist Robert Saxé used a 1926 Gillet-Hertal 'Tour de Monde' to cover 22,000km between June and December of 1926, marking the first RTW trip by a French motorcycle.

The little black Gillet was remarkably intact, but looked as though it hadn't started in many years. By contrast, the 1933 Puch 250 of Max Reisch was fired up several times over the weekend. Reisch rode his Puch two-up(!) across the deserts of the Middle East to reach India by land, the first motor vehicle to do so. He wrote it up in a fantastic book – 'India the Shimmering Dream' – a lovely account of two young Austrians seeing a world now vanished. Not that their journey was easy; they came across a competitor's Mabeco-Indian sidecar outfit abandoned in the northwestern Iranian desert, beside his grave.

The little Puch was presented at the Concorso in exactly the condition Reisch rode it, with packs, ropes, tins of insecticide, canvas tents, and a spare tyre attached, and was transported by a family friend of the Reischs, who still own the machine. While the little Puch fired up readily, it did not inspire dreams of long-distance travel! Still, the moment I spotted it on the cruciform motorcycle display at Villa Erba, the magic of the thing won me over. Bucking tradition in favour of honest appeal, the least shiny vehicle at the Concorso di Villa d'Este won Best of Show in a unanimous vote. The little Gillet won its class as well, proving that motorcyclists are all heart, and look beyond sheen and restoration skills, in favour of a really good story, and a bike that proves it. We know that anyone can make or fake a shiny motorcycle, but an authentic history is an irreproducible treasure. CBG

'We know that anyone can make or fake a shiny motorcycle, but an authentic history is an irreproducible treasure…'

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**

Old enough to know better

Williams doesn't want to join the club… any club

TO SLIGHTLY MISQUOTE the sainted Groucho Marx, "I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me…" Although that's not *strictly* true because, certainly in the case of motorbicycling, I have in the shoddy course of my chequered history subscribed to a couple of clubs simply because I cared passionately about key issues… of self-interest. And so for many years a member of the Trail Riders Fellowship (who championed the right to use the green lanes I loved riding) and for rather shorter periods both the Yamaha and Honda owners' outfits (because I needed knowledgeable advice to help keep my old clunkers running).

But go anywhere beyond lay membership of any amateur-run organisation and you pretty soon get involved in factionalism and politics which can be very draining and, more importantly, counter-productive to the aims of whatever it is that you've foolishly volunteered to help run.

Which brings me to the Vintage Motorcycle Club (VMCC), an organisation I have *not* joined but whose glossy monthly magazines a close neighbour of mine passes onto me. And recent issues of said mags have piqued my interest in an outfit that hitherto I rather scoffed at. And for why? Well firstly the word 'Vintage' suggests to me belt-driven contraptions with hand-gearchanges and slab-sided tanks that puttered along just above walking speed shaking one's spine to bits each time they went over a bump. Which are not what I'm interested in, riding-wise.

My secondary disavowal of the VMCC is that they seem to be a nakedly commercial operation, publishing a fat catalogue flogging everything from fancy riding clobber to pattern parts – little or none of it relating to my clearly misplaced idea of 'vintage-ness' – all at premium prices and all with the subtext that by buying from the VMCC you're supporting some kind of charity, which you aren't. The VMCC isn't quite what I'd call a club at all, and at £37, it wouldn't be that cheap to join even if it was (by comparison, the Honda Owners' Club costs £22).

So after my pal, who indeed owns a proper, prewar motorcycle, joined the VMCC and started passing on his spent reading material, I felt duty-bound to investigate a little further before broadcasting any ill-informed prejudices to the world at large – not that that's stopped me in the past. And delving as I did, it got curiouser and curiouser, as Alice remarked to the looking-glass. But let me preface what follows with the heartfelt observation that at least judging by its magazine, the VMCC does a good job providing advice and information to owners of older and in some cases obscure machinery, directly from its roster of marque specialists but also from like-minded members of more than 60 local branches across the UK.

Talking of which, the social aspect of the VMCC seems to thrive, offering as it does the opportunity for like-minded souls to compete in specialist events, join ride-outs and enjoy long and agreeable gastropub meals – at least if numerous photographs in the magazine are anything to go by.

But it seems that all is not well in the VMCC hierarchy, especially with the company directors who don't all agree with the way that it's run, a fact mirrored if not caused by some of the lay membership who aren't happy with the status quo, either. One reason for this is declining numbers, and although the VMCC's website claims 'over 17,000 members', its recent magazines record a steady decline in membership, the latest (May) issue standing at 15,026 – still a hefty figure for such a specialist interest group.

Despite this, and possibly because of its commercial activities, the VMCC is wealthy and its wealth is increasing. Records at Companies House show net current assets rising from £395,164 for its 2015 financial year to £525,548 for 2016, and its total assets, which include lots of mouthwatering motorcycles, topping £1.12million for 2016, up from £1.02million in 2015. Now no one should begrudge a company its profits and resources, but I can see why some lay members have expressed unease at the way the VMCC is run. This is evidently a reflection of the high turnover of paid staff at its Burton-on-Trent offices and changes to its rules and procedures dictated from on high, some even going so far as to propose resolutions at the recent AGM calling for directors' resignations.

The thing is, along with and as evidenced by VMCC membership numbers, the world of classic bike aficionados is slowly shrinking as, to be brutally frank, we're all dying off. Thus one of the proposed changes is the VMCC should embrace machines as little as 15 years old – currently the limit is 25 years (and it used to be prewar).

Personally, I think that would be a good idea for any such organisation which hopes to survive, be useful and indeed prosper in the coming decades. But some VMCC members, cherishing the club's clearly old-fashioned (and lucrative) image are agin this. But if, heaven forbid, I was running the outfit I'd change its name to something more inclusive of the wider classic bike cohort, and then actively recruit them. But if that did happen, then it would probably still be a club that wouldn't have me… Phew, what a relief! CBG

'Go anywhere beyond lay membership of any amateur-run organisation and you pretty soon get involved in factionalism and politics which can be very draining and, more importantly, counter-productive…'

WHO IS MARK WILLIAMS?

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

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PAUL MILES

The worst of times

Silver linings and their clouds

I'VE OWNED LOTS of bikes. I've also drunk lots of wine and had lots of wives; don't judge me. As a consequence I regularly get asked which are the best bikes I've ever ridden. How do you answer that? Best for touring, going fast on, two up, working on, looking at? The list is endless. The answer is, invariably, the Rudge, of course.

Which leads nicely on to the next question – the worst bike. Now, I've owned and ridden thousands of two-wheelers and can honestly say I've yet to ride a truly terrible motorcycle, even the worst has some redeeming features (not being a car, for instance). But I've straddled some disappointing machines in my time and I think my worst bike would be an amalgam of these.

Engine performance of a Laverda Montjuic. Fêted as a brain-in-a-bucket street racer when launched, the reality was a flat, near gutless 500cc twin that needed revving beyond the factory maximum in order to keep two-strokes half its capacity in the same postcode. No air filters and a straight through exhaust, coupled with 'racing' camshafts ensured that every set of traffic lights was a throttle-blipping, ear-shattering embarrassment, only offset by the faint trickle of petrol blown back out of the carbs running down your leg.

The riding position of a Ducati MH900e. Launched at the stroke of midnight and sold online, the limited edition Superbike was a thing of such beauty it simply had to be brilliant, right? Wrong. Imagine lying prone on an ironing board. Now push your arms down and legs up until you approximate a Commando Z plate. That's pretty much the position. Then, fit mirrors that start just behind the line of your ears, but are much higher than your head and only shoulder width. There, welcome to the Ducati Limited Edition experience. It had other faults, but it was cruel to make something so pretty so terrible to sit on.

The maintenance-friendliness of a Triumph twin. I recall the first time I ever spun the spanners on one of Mr Turner's masterpieces. Again, it's a very pretty and iconic piece of design. I needed to change the final drive sprocket, a 10-minute job on a Japanese bike. On this monstrosity, I had to remove the exhaust, footrest, brake pedal, primary drive cover, clutch assembly and primary drive, alternator and inner chaincase, just to reach the sprocket nut; requiring a special tool, of course. There's a TV advert for M&Ms where everything a man touches explodes into tiny pieces of candy. That's the clutch rollers, that is. Rebuild the top end of one at your peril. It looks suspiciously simple, but everything leaks like the Mary Rose unless you spend hours caulking the metaphorical decks. Utter junk from tip to tail. I loathe Triumphs.

The electrics of an Italian bike. It really doesn't matter which. Take the Ducati Darmah, built to be the Italian alternative to the Japanese invaders. Suzuki switchgear, Japanese clocks and, erm, a fusebox suspended upside down under the headstock, right where rain spray would catch and eventually fill it up, shorting the entire system. The factory 'fix'? A new lid, with two holes drilled in it to let the water out. The fuses vibrated loose and dropped out anyway, of course. Or, ask the owner of the much-loved Morini 3½ to let you have a peek of what lurks under the side panel. A mess of wiring that defies rational explanation. Or the Italian singles with eight wires coming off each battery terminal. The list is endless and endlessly depressing.

The gearbox of a Clubman Gold Star. The fabled RRT2 box is essentially a six-speeder with the first two ratios missing. Never has town riding been more miserable. Narrowly beating into second place the Albion gearbox from a Royal Enfield. What bright spark thought it a good idea to use something designed for a lathe in a motorcycle? Between each ratio lies Switzerland.

The clutch of a Velocette. Designed by, no doubt, a clever engineer. Such a shame he never actually rode a motorcycle. Achieves that nadir of slipping and grabbing at the same time as well as burning out if held lifted for more than 8.6 seconds. Set up using a bent nail, time hasn't been kind to the design.

The styling of a Japanese custom. Incredible innovators and brilliant at refining other manufacturers' concepts, they seem to have a collective insensibility when it comes to creating a custom look. Everything gets toned down to about 80% of what is possible, except for the faux chrome that's dialled up to 11. Topped off with an absurd name, they deserve every brickbat coming their way. Tempter, anyone? How about an Intruder?

The utter pointlessness of a giant road cruiser. I really don't care if your two-wheeled car has a reverse gear or electric centrestand. If it weighed half a ton less it wouldn't need them. And running lights, pillion speakers, CB radios, a refrigerator, it's all junk and an abomination.

So, my worst ever bike would be a 500cc twin, with Velocette clutch failing to control a BSA gearbox. It would take me three days to change the spark plugs and leak oil like a supertanker on the rocks off Beachy Head. It would weigh 900kg and the on-board fridge would run via an exposed five amp fuse down near the rear axle. My face would be looking straight down at the filler cap and I could admire the plastic chrome badge proclaiming that I proudly ride an ElectraWing Tormenter. Yummy, where do I sign…? CBG

'I've owned and ridden thousands of two-wheelers and can honestly say I've yet to ride a truly terrible motorcycle, even the worst has some redeeming features (not being a car, for instance)…'

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 FANTASTIC

The inside story of how Triumph's experimental department built a Superbike for sixpence, and accidentally created the most famous production racer of all time

WORDS BY FRANK MELLING **PHOTOS BY** CAROL MELLING / LES WILLIAMS / NATIONAL MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM / MORTONS ARCHIVE

To understand the fame accrued by what, in the final analysis, is only a modified street motorcycle, it is important to remember just how important production racing was in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time as enthusiasm for racing road bikes was at its peak, interest in mainstream GP racing was at an all-time low ebb, with spectators becoming weary of an endless stream of twin-cylinder Yamaha two-strokes in the smaller classes and the legendary Giacomo Agostini giving high speed demonstrations with the bigger MVs. By contrast, production racing had a plethora of factory-entered bikes of all sizes, shapes and capacities.

Production racing also offered a huge publicity return for every pound invested. The top bikes were comparatively cheap to make and the leading riders were highly affordable. For example, following Malcolm Uphill's 100mph TT win in 1969, Uphill received £50 prize money and £70 in trade bonuses – plus the bike on which he had won the TT. Malcolm was later invited to the factory for a VIP reception to celebrate the win. At this star-studded event, the TT winner was publicly thanked – and then given a £12 transistor radio. Rossi, eat your heart out!

The bikes which won were cheap too. All Triumph racing machines started life as production line rejects. Les Williams, the mechanical genius behind much of Triumph's race success, remembers how the Triumph Tridents for the 1970 TT arrived in the experimental department. "When a bike was run on the rolling road, if it wasn't up to standard we would get it instead of it being rectified. Our first bikes all had oil pump failures, so the main parts of the bikes were fine."

The 1969 Production TT had been a bonanza for Triumph in terms of publicity, with Uphill's 100mph lap becoming the stuff of legends. However, the story nearly had a very different ending. Here's Les again: "When we stripped the bikes down we saw how close we had been to a disaster. The pistons on Malcolm's bike were cracked and they wouldn't have lasted another half lap. Everyone knew then that we needed the triple if we were to carry on winning in production racing."

Not that things were straightforward, as Les explains: "The Americans were pressing the BSA board" – because Triumph were part of the BSA Group – "to go to Daytona for 1970, so a decision was made that we were going to race the triple."

Back then, Doug Hele was Triumph's development engineer and the mastermind behind their racing success. He "came down to the experimental department and explained what we had to do. To be honest it was all a bit of rush.

"The experimental department was a very close team – more like a family than a factory. All the four mechanics were involved in the discussions because although Doug was in overall charge and I was the foreman, or something approximately like this, we were a team and everyone was encouraged to contribute ideas.

1

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We took a standard triple to Castle Combe, with Percy Tait to ride it, and it didn't handle well enough to race seriously so I worked with Rob North, who we already knew from a frame he made for Percy a year earlier, to make a proper race chassis which was the first 'high boy' frame – and this did handle.

"Rob made the frame in 30 hours from scratch, which was an amazing piece of fabrication. At the same time, we worked on the standard road engine and we found that it would give plenty of power. To prepare for Daytona, in the winter of 1970, we went to South Africa with Ray Pickrell, Paul Smart and a couple of mechanics to get some idea of how the bikes would work in a hot climate, and then it was almost straight to Daytona, which was the most important race in America. The production racers had to take very much a back seat until things settled down."

When pressed about the importance of the production bikes at this stage, Les gave an interesting answer: "They were just another job. Every job was important and we wanted to win every race we entered – but you have to remember that we didn't have a dedicated race shop. Race bikes were done in the experimental department, and always on a very tight budget, so we did what we could with the resources we had."

The Trident production racers were helped hugely by the factory's experience with the Bonnevilles. The alloy fuel tank, rear set footrests and 'clubman' handlebars were all direct lifts from the twins and, in theory at least, they were all available to be purchased as Triumph accessories, as was the brand-new, five-speed, Quaife race gearbox. However,

the components which went into the engine weren't over-the-counter kit.

The triples could be made to produce power, and reliably too, in a way the Bonnevilles could never achieve. From the typical figure of 58bhp produced by a good Trident road bike, the Triumph team was soon getting 70-plus of useable power from the production racing engine – equating to a genuine 150mph in the Isle of Man. Because the triple owed so much of its engineering to the earlier twins, a considerable amount of this racing experience was carried across to the new engine. The TH6 race cam was used, along with ball-ended tappets and W&S valve springs with titanium valve caps and collets. The rockers were lightened and polished for reliability. To help breathing, the cylinder heads were meticulously ported and the high compression pistons matched to individually machined squish bands in the cylinder heads.

Doug Hele and Les Williams shared a common passion for the complete racing bike, where neither power nor handling was allowed to take precedence over making a bike which was useable over the whole course of a race. Les said: "It wasn't the absolute power we wanted – but race-winning power that the rider could make the best use of: that was the only thing which counted."

The production racers ran on 27mm Amal Concentric carburettors as fitted to the road bikes to comply with regulations. The ray gun silencers, which were loathed by customers on the Trident and Rocket 3 road bikes, were actually a sound piece of engineering. Les tried them without any baffles but found that they were much more efficient with the standard road-ready reverse-flow baffles. It's just a shame they are so ugly. To go with the silencers the exhaust pipes were raised and tucked in.

The standard Trident frame was designed by Doug Hele, so it was no surprise that the core handling was fine. The biggest improvement was fitting an enormous 250mm double sided, 2ls Fontana brake which was needed to stop the big, heavy triple from 150mph. The front forks were tweaked by removing the cast shuttle valve damper and replacing this with shuttle valves machined in the Triumph tool room. With the hand-made valves, adjustments of 10 thousandths of an inch could be made and the front forks were then excellent.

1: The heart of Triumph's Slippery Sam, the free-revving three-cylinder engine has the traditional right-hand gear change with up for first

2: Ray gun silencers were deeply unpopular on the road-going Tridents but when raised to avoid the road, they worked very well on the race bikes

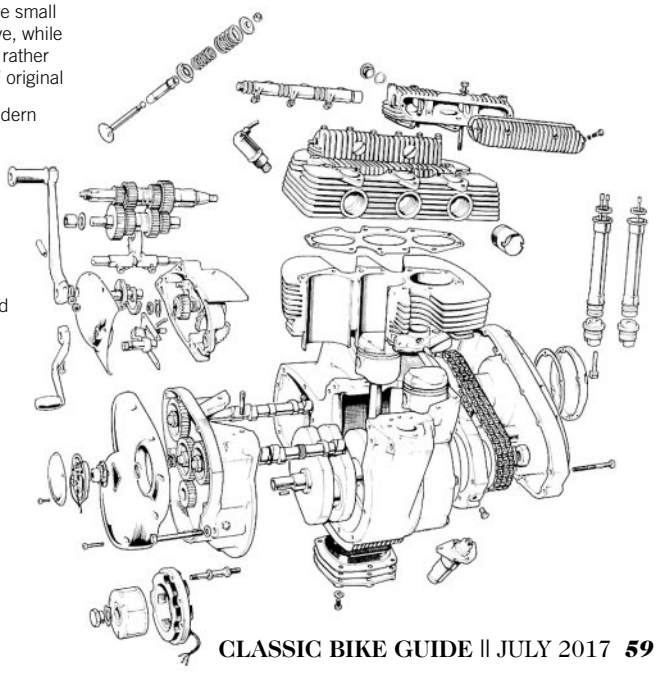
3: Our Man Melling, going well

4: Triumph's Slippery Sam. Always an iconic sight, recognised by many, riders and non-riders alike

5: The twin discs are small but surprisingly effective, while modern rubber grips rather better than the 'classic' original

6: Compared to a modern racer, instrumentation on the Triumph is ultra-minimalist

Right: The power comes from within – and there is much within where Trident engines are concerned



Girling built unique dampers for Triumph. They looked like the items you could buy over the counter but had special damping in them. Girling provided three sets for each bike, each with slightly different damping. Dunlop supplied the new TT100 supersports road tyres in a 19in size, and these larger rims gave a little more ground clearance than the 18in wheels used on many race bikes of the time.

Favoured Triumph dealers could purchase most of the special parts used on the works bikes directly from the factory because these had to be, at least nominally, available to comply with production racing regulations. However, the full tuning kits were very tightly controlled and released only to dealers who were likely to be successful with the bikes they built.

The TT was the biggest production race of the year and Les set off with high hopes for the race in June 1970. You can imagine the scene. All the Triumph workers stream out on to the lawns outside the Meriden factory and there is a huge send-off. Managing director Lionel Jofeh comes across from Small Heath to shake the team members' hands and wish them bon voyage. Except that it wasn't quite like that…

Here's Les: "For a start, we only had one knackered old Transit van which belonged to the experimental department. Van hire had just started in Coventry so we went to Batleys and hired a second Transit. We all piled into the two Transits – the whole team. I used to watch every penny to save money. I was always worried about management thinking that we were spending too much money on racing, so I had to be careful.

"We all stayed in a little guest house in Douglas. Sometimes, five of us shared one bedroom. It wasn't very posh but we had a nice breakfast – the full English – and then meat and two veg in the evening, so it was good. The BSA lot had a real budget and stayed in the Douglas Bay Hotel, but we weren't bothered because we knew we could beat them so we were happy where we were.

"Norton had sponsorship from John Player cigarettes, but our management wouldn't accept sponsorship so we weren't flash. We were all in different overalls and didn't look very professional but Fred Green, the Triumph sales manager, got some nice overalls for us from Rivett's Leathers so we looked the part. Later in the season, when we went to the Bol d'Or, Paul Butler, the Dunlop competition manager, came to see us and asked where our team clothing was. I said that we didn't have any, so the next morning he came back with ten Dunlop jackets, which were much appreciated. They were really nice jackets.

"The triples went well at the TT but they grounded out everywhere – and I do mean everywhere. The three-cylinder engine was wider than the twin and so the primary chain case and timing cover grounded all the time. Brian Steenson was riding the factory BSA triple and it was like a sledge, just sliding about from one corner to another. But we had a fix for our bike.

"We rented a garage from a private house up on Mona drive and there was an old Fiat outside. So when it was quiet we 'borrowed' one of the bumpers and made protectors for the engine from it. We slipped these between the engine and the fairing, they worked fine and Uphill won the race for us, beating Peter Williams on the factory Norton. Brian Steenson retired on the BSA and Bob Heath was fifth on the second works BSA, so we knew that we had got everything right.

"When we got back to the factory everyone was pleased but there was no champagne or wild party. We'd just done our job which was to win races for the least possible expenditure – and that's what we'd done."

Despite the success, there was agreement that the frame was dangerously low, so it was decided to raise the engine by 1 3/8". Today, this would have been a sophisticated piece of computer aided design requiring hundreds of hours of meticulous planning… but not at Triumph in 1970.

Les tells the actual story: "When a road bike came back to the service department from a big crash they rebuilt it totally, so that the customer effectively got a brand-new machine. They were very proud of the level of service they offered to Triumph customers. There was one old boy down there who could do anything with a frame. He could straighten anything out, braze it – anything. We went to see him, explained what we wanted and he modified the frame for us and it worked straight away. You could get anything done in the factory if you knew who to ask."

Towards the end of the season, the French Triumph importer pressed the factory to enter the prestigious Bol d'Or, held at L'Autodrome de Linas-Montlhéry just outside Paris. Tom Dickie and Paul Smart won the event for Triumph, covering 469 laps, a total of 1838 miles at an average speed of 76.553mph – a truly incredible performance.

1: Three rubber-mounted 32mm Amals feed the 750cc three-cylinder engine which was prepared by Doug Hele's Meriden race team

2: The TT fairing is huge and very comfortable at high speeds; ideal for long race venues like the Isle of Man

3: Sam was built for rider comfort at high speeds in long races long ago. It's big machine by modern racebike standards, being entirely based around a road-going sports tourer

4: Hand built, oil filled Girling rear shocks were the best available in the day but are very basic

"There was no champagne or wild party. We'd just done our job which was to win races for the least possible expenditure – and that's what we'd done…"

3

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THANKS TO

Les Williams and Norman Hyde for their help with this feature, and to the National Motorcycle Museum (thenmm.co.uk) for allowing Mr Melling loose on one of their most precious motorcycles

Ironically, the headlines weren't wild about the Smart/Dickie win. Instead Percy Tait and Steve Jolly stole the show. They finished fifth, and covered in oil, on the second factory Triumph. So what actually happened in this legendary incident?

Les actually knows: "The problem started because we were given Duckhams mineral oil for free but I wanted to use a castor racing oil because of the extreme valve tip wear we were experiencing. Duckhams gave us some of their R40 and we put this into the engines. The problem was that castor and mineral oils are not compatible and I think that the castor oil caused a blockage in the oil cooler. This made the engine wet sump and the oil blew out of the engine breather and all over poor old Percy Tait – who was not happy. But the bike still finished and we called it 'Slippery Sam' after this."

Slippery Sam went on to win everything there was to win in production racing, so what was the event which Les remembers most fondly?

"When the Triumph factory closed, I was able to buy the bike for £300, which was an awful lot of money for me at the time. I continued to race it under my own name. I spent a lot of time refining the bike until it weighed under 400lb ready to race. For 1975, the production TT was going to be a 10-lapper and everyone told me not to race the bike. It was a legend and to have it blow up and destroy its reputation would have been a tragedy.

"But the bike had done nearly 2000 miles in one Bol d'Or so I was sure it could manage 10 laps of the 37¾ mile TT course – and it did. Dave Croxford and Alex George won at a race average of 99.61mph and the bike never missed a beat. That was my proudest moment with Slippery Sam."

As a seminal piece of British motorcycle history, Slippery Sam eventually found a permanent home in the National Motorcycle Museum and then, in 2003, disaster struck. A fire swept through the museum and the iconic bike was badly damaged. Les was determined to restore it to its original condition.

"The alloy parts suffered badly but we had some good luck. The original, lightweight fairing was still upstairs in my loft because the bike had been fitted with one of the heavier ones when it was on display in the museum. Then many of the key parts could be salvaged – even down to the oil tank with the dent from where Norman Hyde (then a Triumph development engineer who worked with Les) belted it when he fell off in a drag race at Silverstone. So no, the bike you see now is not a reproduction but is the real bike just as we raced it."

Above: The best production racer of its generation. Mr Melling gets down to it…

Thanks to James Hewing, the National Motorcycle Museum's director, I was given the privilege of riding Slippery Sam in a classic bike demonstration and while I felt very honoured, I approached the bike with a lot of trepidation. I race a Manx Norton, which is slim and light, and a 500cc Seeley Suzuki which is positively miniscule: Slippery Sam isn't! In fact, for a race bike, this is a huge motorcycle in terms of width and length. The cockpit is so immense that you could have a barbecue in there and not have to emerge from behind the fairing.

But it is also a wonderfully practical place to be for long races on fast courses. Its size makes the bike extremely comfortable and the ergonomics of the controls, fuel tank and handlebars are perfect. If you wanted somewhere perfect to live when you were doing 150mph down Sulby Straight, this would be it. On the tight little course where I rode the bike, its weight was very apparent, but there was the feeling that, given 100mph corners, it would be as stable as the Orient Express.

The engine feels very modern, but in a classic way, with effortless, creamy power and no sense of sharpness. In the dark of the Bol d'Or or the rain and the bumps of the TT course, this is an engine on which you could rely. In fact, that was the single most important thread running through the whole bike: a racing motorcycle perfectly fit for purpose and entirely worthy of its legendary status. CBG

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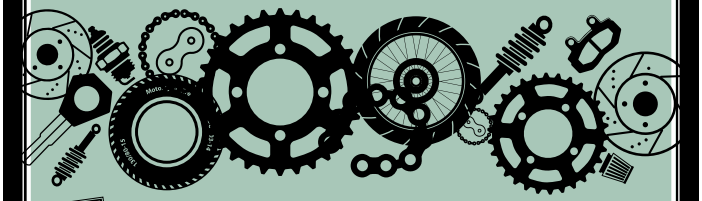

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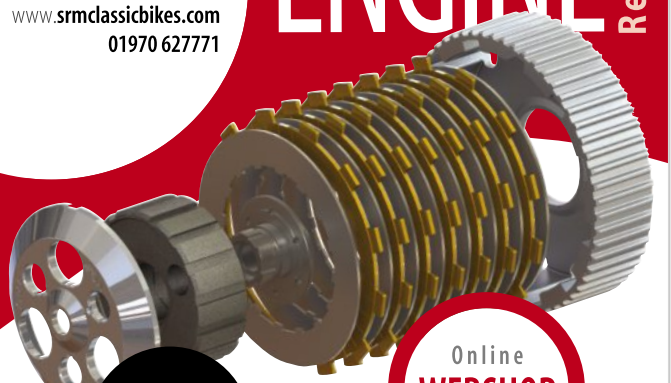

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Home brewed

Before the advent of the ubiquitous Japanese four-pot motorcycle engine, the combination of a straight four and two wheels was rare. Rarer still were home-built fours…

WORDS BY ALAN CATHCART
PHOTOS BY KEL EDGE

Britain has always had a tradition of building bitzas, aka specials. This was especially popular during the Second World War, when production of civilian bikes essentially ceased, leaving ever more ingenious ways of concocting basic transportation, which moreover used less of the scarce petrol ration to get you about, to become common practice.

But it was in the postwar aftermath that special-building really took off, thanks to the ready availability of ex-War Department (WD) equipment, ranging from spare parts to complete motorcycles, which could be bought for next to nothing as war surplus hardware, often however in pretty poor condition.

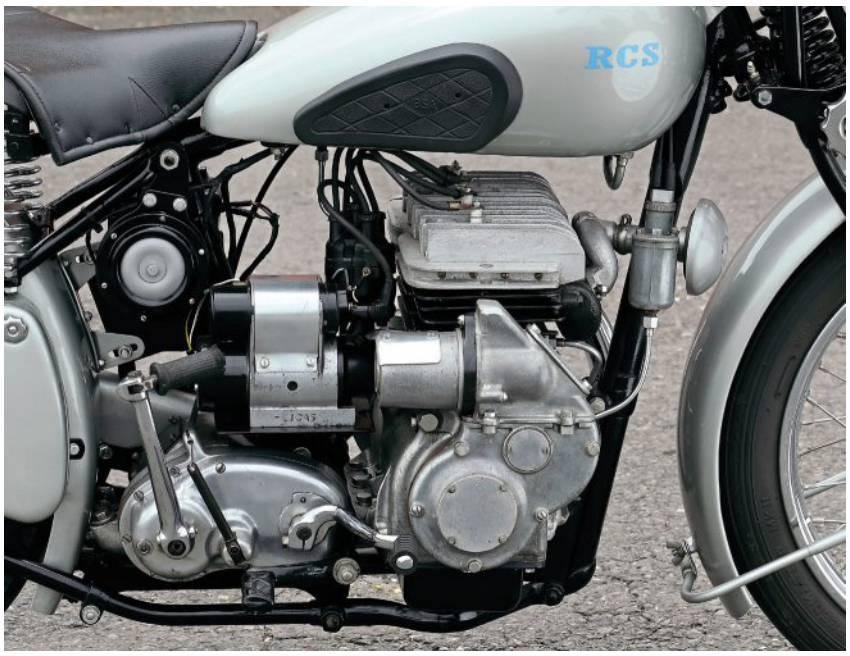
Since the export drive dictated that precious resources of metal and plastics had to be directed towards earning money overseas, mainly from America, to rebuild the UK's finances – laid low while helping rid Europe of Hitler – this meant that scarce new machines sold in the home market commanded a price premium, leading several people to pursue ➧

building ever more esoteric creations as the most cost effective way of getting about.

However, few special builders were as adept at conceiving and then fabricating what became known collectively as a JABS – Just Another Bloody Special! – as Birmingham engineer Bob Collier. He built one after another over a 30-year period, and in the process of doing so, he displayed an uncanny ability to predict future trends, as well as to conceive innovative solutions verging on the avant-garde to resolve technical conundrums that had major manufacturers puzzled. Nobody today can appreciate this better than trials and road racing legend Sammy Miller, whose eponymous museum in England's New Forest is home to several of Bob's creations.

Above: Recognise this? Of course you don't. It's unique

Below: Recognise this engine? Of course you don't. It's not what it might appear to be



"I knew Bob quite well when I was at Ariel in the Fifties, and he was just round the corner at Norton," says Sammy. "I had the greatest respect for him, both for his constant ability to come up with something new that nobody else had thought of, and the fact that he did all of the work in building these bikes himself, often on a shoestring.

"He'd combine parts from often unlikely sources to create something new and different, but he rolled up his sleeves and did most of the work on building each bike himself. I really admired him for that – and especially for one special he made that really interested me.

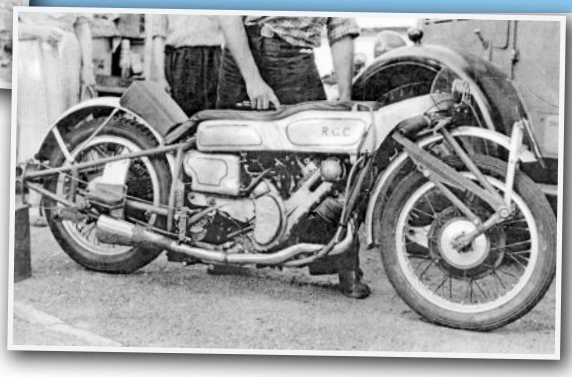
"It was a trials Norton where he'd canted the engine over by about 60°, and then put the gearbox beneath the cylinder, instead of behind the crankcase. At a stroke it lowered the cee of gee and shortened the wheelbase – it was a very clever bike."

Born in 1913, Bob worked for four years as a draughtsman at Fort Dunlop, before jettisoning his pencil and drawing board in favour of a hacksaw and file by joining the Dunlop experimental department, where he worked throughout the Second World War in what was a protected occupation, meaning he wasn't allowed to enlist in the armed forces. Instead, he joined the Home Guard as an after-hours despatch rider aboard a venerable 1920s 500cc Model 18 Norton, which made hard work of keeping up with the Triumph twins and cammy Velocettes of his comrades.

Hence Bob's decision to build a large capacity parallel-twin ohv Norton five years before his future boss Bert Hopwood created the Dominator in 1948, which duly led to the Commando. Bob did this, however, by essentially combining two 1930s Model 18 single engines side-by-side, mounted in a 1930

Above and below: The bikes worked hard for their creator. Here's an earlier RCS Austin four, parked up at the 1947 DK Mansell Trial

Above: The man himself. Bob Collier in 1943, with his home-built 1056cc Norton twin engine carried in a Matchless Silver Hawk frame



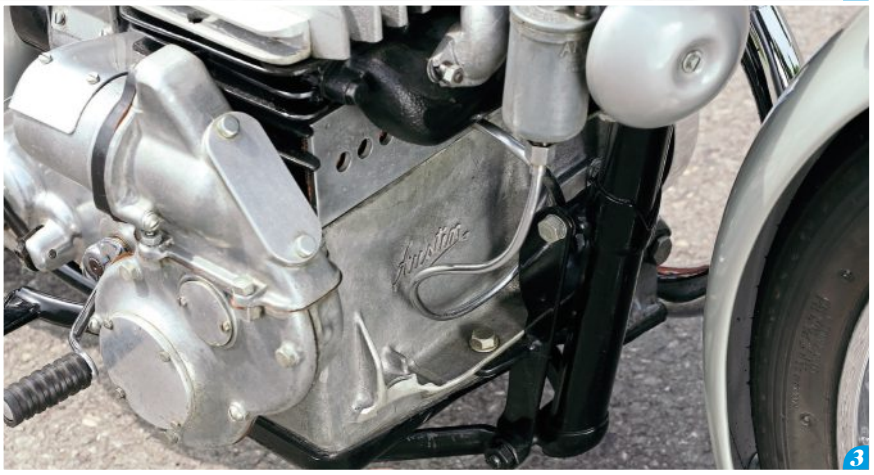
Left: Back before full fairings and streamlining were adopted, one way to race winning performance was to reduce the frontal area by lowering the machine as far as possible. Bob Collier's solution was this, seen at the Belgian GP at Spa in 1953, an AJS 7R-engined RGC

Below: Bob Collier's clever engineering worked well in trials, as seen here at the 1967 Scottish Six Days Trial. The engine's an early side valve Norton single, canted over to the max, while the forks are AMC Teledraulics

Matchless V4 Silver Hawk frame, and overbored to accept Levis pistons to create a 1056cc wartime Norton Superbike capable of over 100mph. When he completed it in 1943 this device had an all-round level of performance, even on low octane pool petrol, that nothing else emanating from Norton's Bracebridge Street factory would ever deliver before the firm moved south and created the Commando. Sammy Miller is pretty scathing about that, though: "Collier showed Norton how to do it, and as usual they completely ignored him," he says!

Later on, after the war ended, Bob Collier joined Feridax, a Birmingham-based producer of motorcycle accessories and clothing, for whom he worked as the development engineer. In 1949 he moved to work at Norton's Experimental Department under Bert Hopwood, where he collaborated with Cyril Smith in producing the low-built sidecar outfit with which Smith won the 1952 Sidecar GP World Championship. That same year Bob produced another even more avant-garde road racer under his own aegis, called the RGC (his initials). This was a 350cc GP single consisting of a 1949 AJS 7R engine canted over at 45° to produce an ultra-low wind-cheating device in those pre-streamlining days, with a radical design of trailing-link front suspension, similar to that later found on the mid-1970s French-built HO 500 and BUT 250 GP racers.

Bob also produced several bonded-rubber suspension systems, including a sprung hub design fitted to a BSA A7, which apparently worked even better than Triumph's similar effort on the Speed Twin, as well as a variable length handlebar to permit a sidecar outfit to pass through a narrow gap, and a fully-sprung, banking sidecar outfit which did not roll in corners, on which the passenger ➧



used a steering wheel to control the lean of the sidecar where appropriate, thus also optimising suspension response.

But it was for a series of four-cylinder motorcycles powered by the Austin Seven car engine that Bob was best known, including one that was conceived for his chosen sport of sidecar trials, at which he excelled.

"Bob was a natural sidecar rider who was both skilled and brave," says Sammy Miller. "Several manufacturers would have provided him with support, but he wanted to ride a bike he'd built himself, with an Austin Seven engine. We have two of them here, one of which his grandsons Matt and Mike Collier donated to the Museum Trust in 2012, together with Bob's Norton twin and a lightweight trials chassis. We already had an earlier example of Bob's four-cylinder trials bikes in the museum, so we're planning to make a Bob Collier Area in honour of this great innovator."

It seems that Bob had previously briefly owned one of the 10 examples of the Brough Superior Four, also powered by a lengthways-mounted Austin Seven engine, which had been introduced in 1932, essentially for sidecar use, with its twin rear wheels. This was because George Brough chose to use the standard Austin three-speed car gearbox, complete with reverse, driving a prop shaft to a crown wheel and pinion mounted in a specially cast housing between the rear wheels. The intrepid Bob was apparently pretty unimpressed by the performance of this unwieldy and heavy, yet costly device, and reckoned he could do a lot better himself, working in his own garden workshop, as opposed to the well-equipped Brough factory!

So it turned out, although according to an article Bob penned for *The Motor Cycle* (he wrote several articles of both a philosophical and practical nature recounting the creation of many of his home-brewed devices), it wasn't until 1945, just as the war was ending, that he built his first four-cylinder bike, which he obtained by shoe-horning a 1920s side valve Austin Seven motor into a frame formerly housing a 1932 550cc New Hudson side valve single.

This was far from being the first such special built with a car engine, as other bitza-builders had positioned the motor lengthways in the frame, like in the Brough. However, this layout brought the attendant problem of a lengthy wheelbase, as well as a need to switch the drive through 90° to turn the rear wheel if the car gearbox was retained, or else combining the engine with a motorcycle transmission. Bob mounted the engine transversely instead, just as he perhaps had seen Gilera do on its supercharged 500cc GP racer that won the final European Championship before the outbreak of hostilities. Was this the first road bike of the modern era with the engine format adopted two decades later by Honda? It very well could have been…

However, Bob never completed this first of the six four-cylinder bikes he created in the postwar era because, as he recounted to readers of *The Motor Cycle,* he was selling a 600cc Sunbeam to raise funds for the special, and someone who came to look at that bike instead insisted on buying the almost completed RGC Four, as it was called!

This gave Bob the funds to start work on a second, improved version incorporating the lessons he'd learned on the first such bike, with the Austin engine still water-cooled, as original, and slotted as before into another New Hudson frame. This went well, but the rigid frame was unsatisfactory to Bob, who was an eager exponent of rear suspension, hence his experiments with bonded rubber rear ends. So, for his third four-cylinder road bike he this time slotted the Austin engine into – wait for it! – a 1935 Vincent-HRD frame, complete with cantilever rear suspension as standard, which he used satisfactorily on the road.

Later on, in the late 1940s, Bob built another RGC Four road bike, this time with alternative front suspension in the form of the actual OEC duplex front

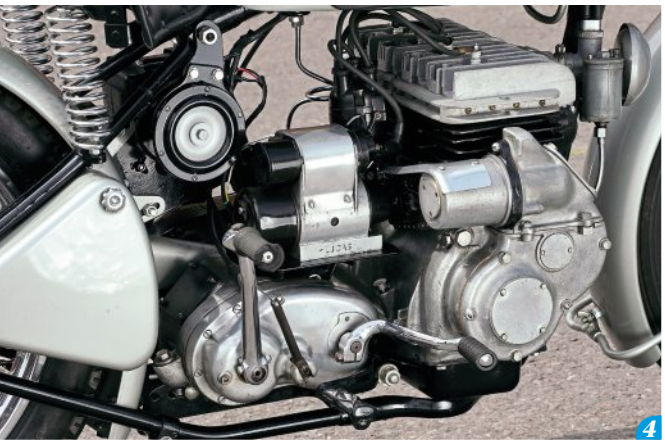
1: Using a car engine is a challenge, not least because they're designed to run in line with the vehicle's centreline. This Austin unit has been turned through 90°, and drive has been taken from the crank's end to a BSA motorcycle gearbox

2: A closer look reveals the external flywheel (part of the clutch assembly on the donor Austin car), with the primary drive chain running inboard of it. The 'Austin' logo is still there, cast into the crankcase

3: Being a side valve design, both the carb and the exhaust are on the same side of the engine. The quality of Bob Collier's conversion from water to air-cooling is very obvious here

4: Further deep thought is evident here. Check out the way drive to the electrical necessities has been taken from the crank, turned through a right angle, and converted to a chain running under a neat alloy cover

5: The basic bicycle is from a WD (War Department) BSA M20, as are the forks and wheels. BSA's single spring girder front end is strong enough, if not entirely cutting edge, even when new



Above: "Twist this, and it'll go faster…" Sammy Miller offers sound advice and encouragement to Alan Cathcart

Left: And away we go. AC gets to grips with 750cc of Austin power

end off Joe Wright's Land Speed Record-breaker – but before that he'd previously built his fifth such Austin-engined bike in 1946.

This four-cylinder Bitza – in his writings Bob always endowed the word with a capital letter – was created to use in trials, invariably with a sidecar attached, and it's this bike that is the older of the two Collier fours in the Sammy Miller Museum. To build it, Bob used a rigid WD Norton frame sourced from Government Surplus, with a few tubes re-bent to give the necessary ground clearance, a Webb girder fork with a New Hudson front wheel (later replaced by Norton teles), and a Norton gearbox and rear wheel. The long-stroke 747cc Austin Seven engine, measuring 56 x 76mm, was a pre-1929 unit using a magneto – replaced by coil ignition from 1930 onwards – out of one of the 290,000 such cars and vans built in Austin's Longbridge factory in Birmingham (10 miles from the Norton factory where Bob would later work) between 1923 and 1939. It used an aluminium crankcase, a two-bearing crankshaft and splash lubrication, with the three-speed gearbox replaced by a four-speed Norton transmission, again ex-WD.

Originally, Bob retained water-cooling, using the

original Austin radiator (he'd used a Scott rad on the original road bike) whose header tank was modified to blend in with the sawn-off Panther fuel tank located behind it.

Bob began riding this on the road as a solo to sort out any problems, but he then began competing on it in sidecar trials to good effect, winning the gruelling DK Mansell Trial on a couple of occasions. But the problem was that the radiator kept getting clogged up with mud on dirt sections in the long distance trials at which Bob was so adept, resulting in the engine overheating, especially on long bottom-gear sections, and either blowing a gasket or, on one occasion, seizing solid. Reasoning that most of the heat was generated in the cast iron cylinder head, Bob removed the water jacket and brazed on an array of ⅛in sheet steel fins in its place. The radiator was discarded and a half-gallon oil tank fitted, with an old lorry pump driven off the existing dynamo drive on the engine to circulate the oil. This now left him with an air-cooled head and oil-cooled block, with the absence of a radiator not only saving weight, but hopefully eliminating overheating.

Apparently, the cooling proved successful in several trials, but to improve it further Bob removed the water jacket from the cylinder block, and fabricated a further array of 50 differently shaped fins to braze onto it to further dispel heat.

"The whole thing was a great success," he wrote. "There was a still greater saving in weight, and I had a unique Austin-engined Bitza as a result. And the job only weighs 387lb." Yes, but one with an engine producing a pretty measly 17bhp at 3800rpm in its Austin automotive application, with just a single Amal carb with remote float positioned in front of the engine feeding all four cylinders. Maybe a freer-flowing motorcycle installation might have added a little extra performance?

BELOW

1: As seen here, as well as the roadster, one of Bob Collier's trials bikes also survives, fully restored, in the Sammy Miller Museum

2, 3 & 4: The earlier machine is suspended at both ends. The front appears to be a conventional telescopic fork, but is in fact a set of wheel-carrying tubes that do not telescope, instead using a pair of links, as in a girder device. The rear wheel is controlled by a clever 'cantilever' swinging arm using rubber in compression as the springing medium – you can see the blocks beneath the fork

5: After restoration, which included fitting a fuel tank from a rather later Norton

Above: All smiles: AC returned the unique machine in one piece

6: Sammy Miller with Bob Collier's grandsons when the unrestored trials bike was delivered to his museum

7: A rather different machine, despite the use of the Austin engine. This uses a Norton gearbox in a seriously modified Norton frame

Since the removal of the radiator left lots of space up front, Bob reduced the wheelbase by taking 4in out of the Norton frame's upper tube, shortening the bottom support rails and making new front engine plates. This resulted in a wheelbase of 53in, making the bike quicker steering and more responsive in tighter sections off-road. Bob also installed a bonded rubber rear end, with the cantilever swinging arm's lower horizontal member bearing on an array of rubber blocks of differing densities, and thus variable malleability.

But a key factor in Bob's success in trials, where if there had been a British championship for such events he would most probably have been crowned champion in two or three successive years on his four-cylinder Austin-engined creation, was the smooth torque and power delivery of the four-cylinder engine, and the excellent power to weight ratio of the Collier Bitza.

"The Austin Seven engine is immensely popular with Bitza builders," he wrote in 1948, "and I have found them almost ideal. These engines are compact, light and accessible. The performance is not to be sneezed at, since it's as good as many a 500cc ohv engine, added to which is the fact that they are both quiet and docile. The unit is comparatively small when compared with, say, a 350cc Levis or 500cc BSA. A visit to a public weighing machine proved to be most surprising, with the Levis engine scaling 87lb, the BSA 105lb, one of the original 500cc Ariel Square Four engines 115lb, and the Austin just 110lb. When comparing these weights, do not forget that the Austin is half as big again in capacity as the biggest of the others. This fact may come as a shock to those who vow that a car-engined Bitza machine must necessarily be heavy."

Bob produced a sixth and final Austin-engined road bike in the 1950s, using a 1933 aluminium crankcase and coil ignition motor that he again modified for air-cooling, to which he added a very professional-looking and quite heavily finned cast aluminium cylinder head that he made himself from scratch. He modified the inlet tract manifold for the side valve engine to be horizontal, with the Amal carb angled to clear the front chassis downtube, and the long single exhaust pipe running neatly away down the left side of the bike to a slim silencer beneath the rigid rear end's wheel spindle. The Lucas dynamo and distributor were moved inboard to the right of the engine, with an auxiliary drive to give good accessibility.

Bob fitted this Austin motor into another ex-WD frame, this time for a BSA M20, retaining the BSA girder fork and four-speed M20 gearbox. It's this bike that was donated to the Miller Museum Trust by the Collier family in quite a poor state, but almost complete, having sat in a shed unused for the past 50 years. Sammy and his colleague Bob Stanley have now restored it to a better condition than when Bob Collier rode it! Bob Stanley is the Miller Museum's mechanical magician, whose accumulated expertise acquired down the years in working with Sammy in restoring the most exotic, improbable and/or unlikely two-wheeled designs to running condition, must be unequalled by anyone. Just take a walk through the host of rare exhibits on display that Sammy ▸

The Sammy Miller Museum in New Milton, Hampshire, UK, is crammed full of interesting machines – including factory prototypes and numerous ingenious designs from all over the world. There's one of the world's largest collections of exotic racing bikes, all of them in running order and including the legendary V8 Moto Guzzi 500, supercharged V4 AJS 500 and postwar Porcupine – the first ever 500cc World Champion, V-twin Husqvarna 500, V4 Suzuki 125, 250 Mondial with dustbin fairing, and innumerable famous bikes from Triumph, Norton, AJS, Velocette & many more! Of course there are plenty of off-road enduro, motocross and trials icons. The museum is open to visitors daily from 10am all year round.

The museum address is Sammy Miller Motorcycle Museum Trust, Bashley, New Milton, Hampshire B25 5SZ. Tel 01425 620777/616644 or visit www.sammymiller.co.uk for further details.

has tracked down and the two of them have made runners out of, to confirm that.

So my chance to sample Bob Collier's engineering skills first-hand came on his final self-built Bitza, since rechristened as an RCS (Robert Collier Special) by Sammy – well, that's what it says on the fuel tank! – rather than the RGC initials Bob's creations always carried there. But – hey, what's in a name? It's the quality and effectiveness of Bob's handiwork that matters, and by any standards this is absolutely superlative.

Thanks to the low compression it's easy to start on the sturdy kick-start lever, and the four-cylinder side valve car engine purrs into life with an extremely sophisticated sense of refinement that's frankly at odds with its home-built history. If you didn't already know that a single clever individual had built all this himself in his home garage, you'd never guess that to be the case, because apart from the vintage-era girder fork that was well passé by the mid-Fifties when Collier concocted this final Four, you'd be complimenting the engineers of the far-sighted manufacturer who had created this luxurious mile-eater more than a decade before Honda followed suit in launching the world's first modern-era four-cylinder Superbike.

This final RCS Austin Four is far from being a performance package, but it wafts along quietly at a smart pace, and is extremely flexible with a wide spread of torque, so it is very relaxing to ride. It's

a pity there's no rev-counter fitted, just a Smiths speedo and an ammeter in the back of the headlight shell, as I'd have liked to have seen how low in revs the Austin engine pulled away from rest, because you need hardly slip the clutch at all, and you're on your way. The clutch lever action is light and positive, while the right-foot, one-down, four-speed gearshift is crisp and short in travel, although you don't need to use it much because the engine is so flexible.

While there's no rear suspension – strange, since Bob was so eager to experiment with this on other bikes – the ride quality is pretty good thanks to the well-sprung and spacious saddle, and the girder front end handled the few bumps on the long private driveway on which I tested the bike, which hadn't yet been registered for the public highway. Sammy is hoping to be able to retrieve the GOC 175 Birmingham number the bike carried when new.

If and when that happens, I'm hoping to persuade him to let me take this last of the line of Collier Fours away for a morning spin through the gorgeous New Forest lanes around his museum. I reckon it'd be me that would come back purring – with pleasure – after doing so! What remarkable testimony it is to the creative talents of a gifted self-taught engineer who, by rights, should have been working for one of the major manufacturers, not spending his spare time showing them how to move British motorcycle engineering forward with his succession of specials.

I hate to say it, but if Bob had been Italian he'd have been scooped up by one such company after building his second or third bike, and we'd nowadays be talking about him in the same respectful terms as Carcano of Guzzi or Ducati's Taglioni. Imagine if he'd been given the resources they enjoyed, and was allowed to let his inventive imagination run wild, in the interests of his employers, and their customers. But thanks to Sammy and his grandsons, Bob's gifted talents are now being recognised – what a pity he didn't gain this level of appreciation while he was still alive. Still, better late than never I suppose! CBG

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A charming motorcycle

The composition of SWM's Gran Turismo may reflect current globalisation trends, but it's a decent bike to ride

WORDS & PICTURES BY OLIVER HULME

Ever since the 1970s there have been regular calls from classic motorcycle buyers for a new, simple, straightforward motorcycle to use rather than a flood of whizzy hi-tech offerings. There's also been much discussion about whether people would actually buy such a motorcycle if it were available brand-new.

The SWM Gran Turismo could have been designed to fill that apparent gap. It's powered by a simple single cylinder engine and built by reborn Italian brand SWM on the shores of Lake Varese. Just a few miles from MV Agusta and with the Moto Guzzi factory over the next mountain, it's in Italy's motorcycle-making heartland. The SWM Classics are Italian-built from Italian, Chinese, Taiwanese and Japanese-made parts and SWM are keen to emphasise their Italian heritage. The Gran Turismo has a four-valve 445cc SOHC twin port single that owes a lot to 1980s Honda designs. There are even vintage type cues, with hex-head tappet covers similar to those fitted to Honda SOHC fours and late Sixties Triumphs.

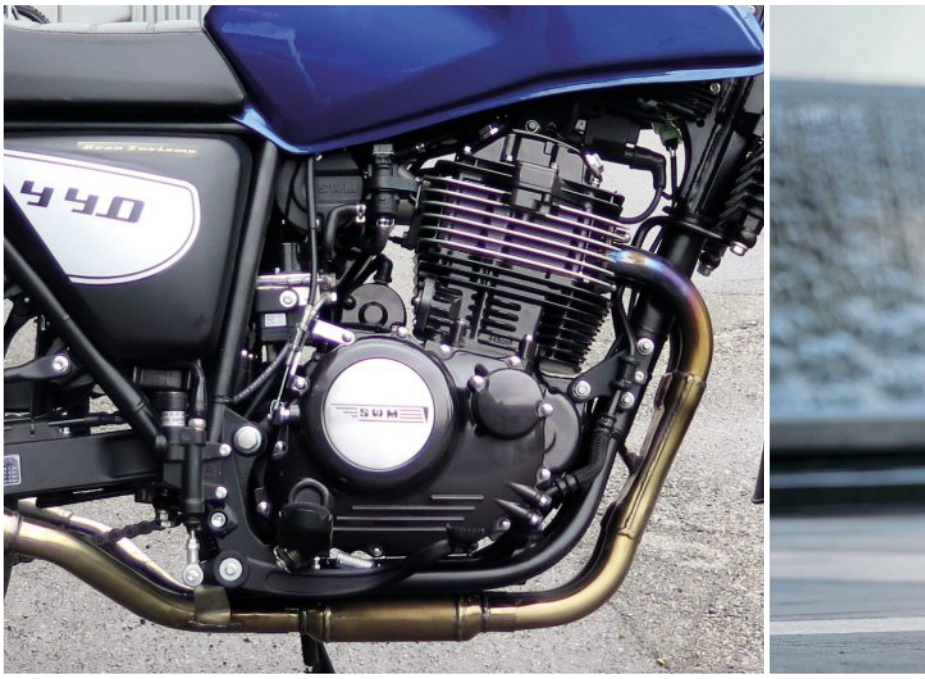
The engine has an oversquare bore and stroke of 90mm x 70mm, a 10:1 compression ratio and produces 30bhp and 27ft/lb of torque at 5500rpm.

The machine has been built to comply with the latest Euro 4 regulations, which means it has been fitted with fuel injection and ABS brakes as standard, a couple of catalytic converters in the exhaust system and, to comply with the rules, it's a bike with no sharp edges. While manufacturers and buyers might bemoan the expense of these regulations, they have resulted in the creation of a charming motorcycle.

Initial impressions of the GT were that it doesn't feel terribly Italian – it's a lot more civilised than that. Everything is where it is supposed to be. There's no flickering idiot light cluster – all the lights sit brightly in the chromed and compact white-faced clocks. The switchgear is simple – push to stop indicators and a dip switch on the left, kill switch and lighting on/off on the right. The headlight mounts are a little reminiscent of late Sixties BSA/Triumph wire items, though a lot more substantial. The seat is reasonably low and the bike seems comfy initially, though the seat might be a little short for a chunky rider to easily accommodate a pillion.

Turn on the ignition and the electronically controlled dials whizz round in the modern fashion. Safety devices abound and the starter won't spin if the engine is in gear with the sidestand down. With the green light on, you thumb the button to start the GT – there is no kick-start, although the engine casing shows its Eighties Honda heritage with a spot on the casting clearly intended for a kicker.

Despite having a fairly hefty 10:1 compression piston to push up and down, the starter had no trouble bringing the engine to life and I shot off after the rest of my riding group, who had left without me. Despite being on an unfamiliar bike on an unfamiliar road in a foreign country, the GT instantly felt familiar, reminding me a great deal of my own Honda FT500. Once it got up to 2500rpm, the engine picked up nicely, power delivery was excellent and it produced enough gentle vibration to remind you it's a real motorcycle, with the twin balance shafts smoothing things out before it got even remotely unpleasant. It's a forgiving engine, too. If you find yourself in the wrong gear you just slip it down a touch, crack open the throttle and the response from the fuel injection system is, as should be expected, instant.



Above: The engine's Honda ancestry is clear. It's been modernised with catalysts and enough gubbins to suit Euro 4 demands, making it pleasant and gentle rather than ferocious and fire breathing

Below: Our man Oliver prepares for take-off.

It wasn't long before I caught up with the rest of the pack, thanks in no small part to the excellence of the Italian motorists, who are probably the best in the world – and they are happy to get out of the way of motorcycles. They are motorbike fans too – at one stop a motorist pulled up behind the group and expounded his delight at seeing the SWMs on the road in a typically Italian fashion. The GT, unsurprisingly, felt like a well-made Eighties Japanese middleweight brought up to date because, after all, that's what it is.

What did feel Italian was the difficulty of finding neutral on the five-speed box with a running engine. It's a challenge, with not a lot of positivity about the process. I thought initially that it might just be this particular bike, which had been thrashed unmercifully for six hours by a succession of heavy footed riders before I got on it and was, as a result,

1 & 2: A study in Euro regs. The Euro 4 machine is the one with the extra black boxes and miles of plumbing for the ABS, etc. This must make sense to someone

3: More clutter on this side of the engine helps us all breathe more easily, so they say

quite warm, but a later test of three other examples showed it was the case across the range. It is a 'feature of the model' as they used to say, which was coped with in the manner familiar to anyone who has owned anything Italian. You either find it as you slow down or turn the engine off, find neutral and start it up again rather than riding the clutch. But apart from the neutral issue, which would probably have become easier to cope with once the box had bedded in and with familiarity, the gearbox was as slick as any new box should be.

If you had been asked in 1987 to pick one of all the Japanese motorcycle engines available that would still be in production 30 years on, Honda's big single would have been one of the least likely candidates. Ultimately descended from the late Seventies 250cc four-valve single that powered the XL250 and CB250RS, the basic design grew to 500cc and, with the addition of an electric starter, it powered the FT500, before a major redesign saw it become the engine for the XBR500 and for the Japanese market GB400TT café racer.

Towards the end of their production run, Honda quietly sub-contracted the production of the engines to Chinese manufacturer Shineray. For Shineray, this was an excellent move, as they now had the design and tooling for a well-designed simple and solid engine to play with, and once Honda gave up on the single it became the basis of a range of engines that now power bikes and quads from a myriad of suppliers. And because Shineray now owns SWM, it was the obvious engine to build a bike around when the firm wanted a mass market roadster – they make 8000 bikes a year and want to build a lot more.

SWM allegedly means Speedy Working Motors, but it is also a conflation of SV.VM – Sironi and Vergani being the surnames of two founders and Vimercate Milano being the location of the first factory. It is not a major heritage name, with SWM being founded in 1971 and foundering in 1984 with no heritage in building road bikes, so it was a curious choice for a Chinese company with ambitions. But SWM's home in Varese, near Milan, had the advantage of having a purpose-built motorcycle factory sitting empty that was once the home of Cagiva. Later on, BMW-owned Husqvarna put together off-roaders there until BMW sold Husqvarna to KTM and the factory closed – leaving a skilled motorcycle-making workforce available.

For SWM it's not just a case of chucking a Chinese engine into a Chinese frame and throwing components at it. At Varese SWM strip the 440 engines, check that everything is as it should be, fit European sourced piston, bearings and gearbox internals and put them back together. The 30bhp power output is softer than the 40cc smaller engine from which it is nominally derived, that fitted to the Honda GB400TT – 4bhp softer in fact. Like the GB400TT and the externally similar Mash 400, the GT has a dry sump engine with a cartridge filter, but it is also fitted with an oil cooler, unlike the Honda or the Mash. The SWM produces more power and more torque and at lower revs than the Mash 400.

SWM also repaint the frame and fit Michelin ➧

tyres and Taiwanese-made suspension. The whole plot has a solid feel. All over the factory are piles of boxes from well-known manufacturers: lights from CEV, chains from DID and bearings from SKF. The oddly angular rhomboid tank looks that way because SWM's designers have been tasked with incorporating some part of the company's heritage into each model and the tank shape is meant to ape the SWM Enduro bikes of the Seventies. At 4.8 gallons on a bike which uses fuel at better than 70mpg, the GT will go a long way between fill-ups.

Out on the road the GT slips through traffic easily, and the mid-height bars made negotiating a switchback of uphill hairpin curves a breeze. What was less of a breeze was keeping up with the rest of the group in heavy traffic and being reluctant to run a red light – they lost me, or to be honest I lost them. I was left with a choice of two directions and took the wrong one – eventually ending up alone in Varese's city centre one-way system. This provided an unscheduled opportunity to try out the bike's potential as city bike. It is nimble, accelerates well from standing and the oversized suspension coped well with the cobbles and the 'sleeping carabinieri'. Having been run pretty much constantly for half a day in warm and humid temperatures, the heat wafting up from the oil cooler was noticeable and keeping it moving at a reasonable lick seemed to be the best way to make sure the engine was happy.

Once out of the city centre, into the suburbs and onto the country roads the GT came into its own. It's a willing performer once you get the revs up above 2500-3000 and it hauled my not inconsiderable bulk along at a decent pace, being happiest at around 55-65mph. SWM don't list a top speed, but one could imagine it topping out at 90mph – though it would be fairly highly stressed at that rate of knots.

The GT handled superbly. You could chuck it into a corner, point it in the right direction and it was barrelling eagerly out of it and onto the next curve in no time. At no point did I feel like the bike was in control of me rather than the other way around. The suspension that had soaked up the city centre's lumps and bumps also did a great job on the out-of-town potholes, so well that you barely felt them, while the steering was so positive you were more than capable of getting around the worst in any case, provided you spotted them. The GT feels incredibly surefooted and nimble on its Michelin tyres, with a spoked 19in front wheel and a 17in rear.

The brakes are Euro 4 compliant ABS jobs; a single 260mm floating disc on the front with a four piston caliper and a smaller 220mm fixed disc on the back with a twin piston caliper. If you haven't ridden a motorcycle with ABS before – and my own experience was a brief dalliance with a K Series BMW a lifetime ago – you'll be astonished by how good these brakes are. Utterly controllable and lock-up free, the Euro 4 regulations that require the fitment of such items might be disliked by the manufacturers at the cheaper end of the market because of the cost, but once you've tried them you won't want to go back.

The only real downside is that the relatively clean lines of the engine are ruined by the boxes of electronic devices that have been forced in behind the cylinder block. SWM had to redesign the single downtube double cradle frame to fit everything in, pushing the rear down tubes back a few inches,

Above: The production cycle of the SWM is a long and remarkable process, involving much foreign travel and intrigue. It culminates here in Italy, on a smart track where the machines are finally prepped for the demands of the European market

Inset: A row of Euro 3 Gran Turismos await shipping to distant markets

1: Clocks are clear, very retro, and the idiot lights are neatly grouped therein. There's little to worry about here, move along now

2: Anchorage is handled mostly by this single disc, complete with its four-pot caliper and ABS system, which works very well, especially in the wet

3: For some riders, the sun is always shining, the skies always blue…

4: …for other riders, less so

5: Amusing to observe that the silencers' baffles are retained by a circlip, which in turn is tack-welded to prevent tampering. Except by anyone with a Dremel or similar. Not that anyone would tamper just to make a bit more noise. Of course not. Perish the idea

Left: Diligent roadtesters will stop at nothing to provide all the facts. One threw the bike down the road to see whether the control lever broke or bent. You can work it out

though this has happened without any apparent ill effects on the handling and, in turn, improved the routing of the clutch cable. Even riding in a torrential downpour made no difference to the braking, and it was as safe and positive as it had been in the dry, while the standard fitment Michelin tyres were quite up to the job.

The front forks are large 43mm diameter items from Taiwanese manufacturer Fastace. They are a lot bigger than those fitted to the GT's Honda ancestors and, wonder of wonders, they are fitted with good quality fork gaiters. At the back are a pair of Fastace oil-damped and nitrogen-charged 15-way adjustable shock absorbers. The good-looking dulled stainless steel megaphone-style exhausts have the baffles held in by a circlip with a blob of weld. This is common Italian practice and the weld could be easily ground off to remove the baffles and make a rortier sound, but that would, of course, make them illegal. The pipes did go blue close to the head.

After an hour the thin looking seat was still as comfortable as ever, though the new vinyl did ruck up a small amount. The mudguards are super practical black-painted steel and the wheel rims have a tough looking powder coating on them. Switchgear was good and the mirrors are useable at all speeds, without the traditional Italian practice of giving you a view of your elbows. SWM appear well aware of both Italian and Chinese motorcycles' reputation for rust and rot and have done all they can to try and

Alternatives:

MASH ROADSTAR

The obvious alternative to the Gran Turismo is the Mash Roadstar. It uses a very similar engine to the SWM and is also Euro 4 compliant. It is also a few hundred pounds cheaper. The Mash isn't as powerful as the SWM and has a much more retro look.

ENFIELD BULLET 500

The Bullet is the one to go for if you want a truly classic look for your steed and, starting at £4395 for the ABS model, it's a considerable saving, though your ride will be a lot less sophisticated and slower than the one that the Italians offer.

DUCATI SCRAMBLER

Ducati's Scrambler 400, built in Thailand, is at the other end of the financial scale, coming in at £7386 for the cheapest model, but it certainly has style – The Scrambler has been so successful that Ducati are now marketing the Scrambler as a brand in its own right.

Honda XBR500

If you want a modern classic, look out for a used 1980s XBR500. The XBR is a lot more powerful than the GT and you can pick one up for between £2000 and £3500.

HONDA CB500F

Honda's confusingly-named 500 twin comes in at just £100 more than the Gran Turismo. Thailand-built, the 500cc twin is a worthy machine and practical too, with all of Honda's refinement. But, sadly, it's unexciting, and nobody is going to ask you what it is like on a club night or rideout.

Ducati 450 Desmo

If you have a desire for an Italian classic, deep pockets, the skills of an engineer and like spending time and money in the workshop, there's always the Ducati 450 Desmo. But you'll need at least £10,000 in the bank just to start with.

Styling of the Gran Turismo is on the mildly interesting side of ordinary, although the engineering is conventional (and therefore should be reliable and capable of very many miles)

break that mould. The toughness of the components was made evident when one poor unfortunate dropped his bike – apart from a few scrapes the only evidence of the off on the bike was a clutch lever that, rather than snapping, was almost bent double.

This is a properly designed and well-built machine. Paint is thick and well applied and the welding looks spot on. All in all, the Gran Turismo feels like a capable and fun motorcycle. It can hack it as a commuter but would be a lot better at that if SWM could spend some time sorting out the neutral finding issue. It feels good on fast roads and rural rides and is interesting and different enough to spark a conversation or two on a Sunday jaunt, requiring not much more than regular oil changes and a wipe down with a cleaning cloth to keep it pristine. SWM have a range of accessories and spares, from panniers and racks to cool looking leather bags to set things off.

It's not a motorway mile-eater, obviously, and there are questions over its potential as a true grand tourer, not least because lots of luggage would ruin the lines, but if you are the sort of rider who is happy to travel with no more than a few pairs of socks and a T-shirt or two in a set of throwovers, with a credit card to pay for stays in rustic inns, it's certainly worth a look. If they'd said I could I'd have happily spent a few days riding it home.

The Euro 4 compliant Gran Turismo comes with two year's warranty and at £5199 it's an affordable price tag for an Italian motorcycle. Shop around and you might still find a cheaper Euro 3 model, if you don't mind sacrificing the ABS, that is. CBG

ENGINE: Air and oil-cooled, SOHC, four-valve single with twin counterbalancers and chain drive camshaft **DIMENSIONS:** 90mm x 70mm **CAPACITY:** 445cc **OUTPUT:** 30bhp and 27ft/lb of torque at 5500rpm. **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 10:1. **FUEL/IGNITION SYSTEM:** 36mm electronic fuel injection, electronic ignition with adjustable advance and digital control, electric start. **TRANSMISSION:** Gear primary drive, six-plate wet cable-operated clutch, five-speed constant mesh gearbox. **CHASSIS:** Steel, single downtube frame with double tubed lower subframe. **SUSPENSION:** Front: oil-damped 43mm telescopic forks; Rear: 2 x oil-damped 15-way adjustable nitrogen charged shock absorbers. **WEIGHT:** 333lbs/151kg (dry) **LENGTH:** 84in **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32in **GROUND CLEARANCE:** 7in **BRAKES:** Front, 260mm floating disc four piston caliper. Rear 220mm fixed disc twin piston caliper with ABS **WHEELS/TYRES:** Front: 100/90 x19 Michelin Pilot Activ; Rear: 130 x17 Michelin Pilot Activ, spoked wheels, powder-coated rims. **FUEL TANK:** 4.8 gallons **TOP SPEED:** 90mph (est) **PRICE:** £5199 otr **INFO:** www.swmmotorcycles.co.uk

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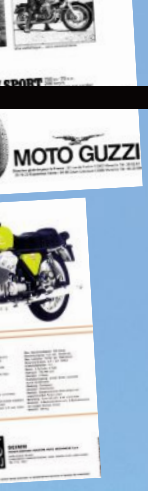


SPORTS 750S

The V7 was so successful as a cult café racer in the 1970s that Moto Guzzi reinvented it for the 21st century. But for some enthusiasts, the original 750s are still the best

WORDS & PHOTOS BY NOLAN WOODBURY

Below: 1972's V7 Sport. A truly, truly striking machine, fast too

GUZZI'S 750 SPORT V-twins combine the leaping stance of a greyhound with serious mechanical bravado. Their muscular mix has always been extremely attractive on paper, but a ride on one will deepen your perspective.

Thin-waisted, the shaftie drops its seat to under 30in when rocked off the stand, making it easy to sit astride. Two cylinders rise up, one on each side, positioned across the frame – unlike Ducati's twins, which orient their cylinders lengthways. Twisting the key opens the automatic fuel tap – engage the starter and you're good to go. Competent for sports or touring, the chassis gives reliable feedback when leaned hard, or when you're hard on the brakes. It's a long reach to those adjustable clip-ons at their furthest position, but it all makes sense when the eager V-twin gains momentum. Remarkably tractable, the engine spins smoothly to reach a surprisingly cammy 6000rpm burst.

Its production run began early in the 1970s and stretches some 40-plus years, the 748cc V7 Sport being the first Moto Guzzi to utilise Lino Tonti's trademark frame. Along with other 650cc and bigger designs from the era, the Sport filled a growing need.

Earlier, in 1965, increased pressure to deliver a faster, more personalised motorcycle found engineer Giulio Carcano and his assistant Umberto Todero at Moto Guzzi confident that their new, all-alloy transverse V7 was the response people were looking for. A lucrative contract with the Italian police force hung in the balance, and few familiar with Guzzi history were surprised when the Mandello firm won. Even so, with exotics like a 500cc V8 racer and rows of pedigreed champions setting the benchmark, the simple pushrod twin seemed a bit underwhelming in comparison. Time would tell.

Guzzi's new signature engine allowed Italy's oldest motorcycle maker to remain in step with contemporary design, but not for long. The good news/bad news scenario was an exciting new 703cc twin, but no money to build it. State intervention saw the entire staff released (including Carcano) and then selectively re-hired by an investment group formed as the SEIMM.

With orders to inject some groove into the Guzzi brand, the first business of new managing director Romolo De Stefani was to hire engineer Tonti and test rider Luciano Gazzola, both previously at Aermacchi. Sometime before 1970, after two years improving, importing and setting speed endurance records on tuned examples of Carcano's touring V7, plans for a new version began.

1971 V7 SPORT

Initial production / VK or C designation / 748cc / 453lb dry / 125mph

RISKING LIFE AND LIMB developing it, Lino Tonti's heroics add volumes to the Sport's heritage. Even with his impressive record as a builder of racers, replacing the legendary Carcano was no simple task. More pressing was Guzzi's response to not just the Honda CB, but to new 750s from BMW and Ducati too. Labour strikes sent the lead engineer to his personal workshop, where materials were gathered to construct a stronger chassis with more ground clearance. Credit Tonti for most of it, but don't forget that his associates from the old team at Aermacchi were also called in to assist. The last V700 racers used a crank-mounted alternator, giving Tonti room to run straight sections of chrome-moly tube between the cylinders and to triangulate the rest in a bolted-up cradle. The main tube is 1.5in in diameter, while the rest vary between 35 and 38mm.

Work progressed as one frame turned into another, then became working test rigs. Following the agenda envisioned by De Stefani, 100-odd units were assembled in the Guzzi race shop during 1971 to meet homologation requirements. A small number were kept by the factory, the rest divided mainly for private orders and press promotion.

New crank and transmission cases, cylinders and heads were all sandcast and meticulously prepared. The forged 78mm crankshaft has twin flywheels and runs on plain bearings. The big-ends are held on a common journal and are also polished, pushing 82.5mm pistons through bores with hard chrome liners. Fairly aggressive cam timing opens the 41/38mm intake and exhaust valves more and for longer than in earlier engines. Under the front cover the crank, cam and oil pump connect via helical gears. Tonti's tuning continued with 30mm Dell'Orto VMB carbs and a twin coil ignition system to generate a genuine 52bhp at 6300rpm. Note the added crankcase ribbing, but otherwise the smooth gearbox case and bevel box resemble those of the touring 750. A dry twin-disc clutch sends energy to that gearbox, modified extensively and with a new cover for the fifth-gear layshaft.

Top: The 1971 MB Special, complete with the ultra-rare factory accessory fairing

Above: The first models failed to feature either a crossover exhaust or indeed a mainstand. They steer well, too

Below: 1971, days of monochrome motorcycles still

Known in first-edition lingo as the red frame Telaio Rosso, other colours were also used. Already a production feature, the Telaio Rosso's 18in Borrani rims were narrower, but the open, Ceriani-like Guzzi-made forks (still at 28° rake), 4ls drum brake and twin Konis were all exclusive to the V7.

The 'MB' Telaio Rosso pictured was prepared especially for the US importer in red with special Mylar trim, a grey frame and the owner's initials. Unsurprisingly, the fuel tank, tool boxes, angled safety bars and seat rails were also new to this model and were then used throughout 750 Sport production. Sent to the press, this machine graced the cover of Cycle magazine in July 1972 wearing red over a grey frame. After solid reviews, Berliner sent the Sport back to Guzzi for this all-black respray. Berliner employee Seth Dorfler purchased it and has since kept the 750 in beautifully maintained condition.

Production numbers for the first batch V7 Sports with CoMo frame run between 100 or twice that, depending on whom you ask. Potential buyers should regard documentation as critical considering the lofty price of admission. Bonhams auctioneers typically sell 1971 first editions for around £40,000. An accurate forgery would be extremely difficult and expensive to do. Dorfler's

bike shows welded-in, double-wall plates at the engine attachment points, and that's just one example of numerous details and special parts unique to the initial Telaio Rosso.

That hand-built exclusivity is the draw of these first-edition Sports, a careful mix of lightweight materials fitted with race-shop expertise. Those lucky enough to experience an early V7 in action reckon the CoMo frame steers more accurately when pushed hard. Press bikes from this production run were also carefully prepped to leave the best impression possible, and comparisons with Kawasaki's top performing 750 Mk IV triple, for example, revealed a shocking gap in performance that favoured the Guzzi.

Private ads and eBay listings are rare – you'll find these machines only in top-flight showrooms and at swanky sales.

Above: That MB special was prepped for the dealer with many factory extras, like Mylar trim

Below: The core of the engine includes a robust crank, with the two conrods running side by side on a single journal

1972-73 V7 SPORT

Second production / VK designation / 748cc / 495lb / 120mph

BY THE AUTUMN of 1971 a main production line was in place for the V7 Sport and some sources claim that Tonti was somewhat surprised after battles with management left his future with the company in doubt. Also new to the company's range was the five-speed 850 GT Eldorado tourer – and that's important, because Guzzi's contract with New Jersey's Joe and Mike Berliner (who played a large role in developing it) was a valuable asset. Meeting these demands meant paying the cost required to tool up for what was essentially a completely new motorcycle, but the investment in Tonti's chassis was money well spent.

The most obvious difference with the second generation V7 is the use of mild steel tubing for the frame and swinging arm, but in basic specification the 1972 Sport was nearly identical to the Telaio Rosso series. Major expenditures include new die-cast cases for the engine, transmission, rear drive, cylinder heads and rocker boxes. The gearbox was cast with strengthening webs and sent the driveshaft to a deep and finned rear drive case, which it shared with the Eldorado. Inside the engine, those special polished internals gave way to regular assembly grade, but tuning specifics reflect the same output; crank-rated at 70bhp using 30mm Dell'Ortos and a Silentium dual crossover exhaust.

Most of the cycle parts carried over, including the quick-turn Tommaselli throttle, matching 18in Borrani alloy rims, 4ls front brake, 180mm spaced cartridge fork and twin Koni shock absorbers. Stampings replaced forgings to hold the adjustable clip-ons, and the updated rocker boxes are unpolished. Style points are added for the Sport's cut-down stainless mudguards (the rear has a handy hinge) and the same thinking was applied to the frame's detachable rails. Twin Veglia clocks host ➧

1

2

3

a warning light panel printed in either Italian or English. Sprayed in red, black or grey, Tonti's frame is contrasted nicely against maroon or green for the tank and locking tool boxes. You raise the saddle to activate a glovebox light… well, for as long as the Italian electrics keep on working.

Much more than the sum of its parts, the V7 Sport was developed primarily by endurance racing. This included big events at some of Europe's larger tracks, where winning comes second only to the exposure it provides. Stress testing showed on the transmission's ribbed-for-your-protection outer case, and much work was done inside the Telaio Rosso's prototype gearbox. Complete reliability remained a year or two away.

Now well known, the problem of peeling chrome bores on older engines is the Sport's biggest wart, made worse with limited filtration. Boring for a steel sleeve was one option, and Guzzi did exactly that with the later 850 and 1000cc engines. The cause? Some noticed that a spike in cylinder issues coincided with the drop in fuel quality during the 1980s, listing detonation as the engine's key enemy. Modern electroplating from newer sources is another option, and a Guzzi owner can take comfort knowing the problem is a surface rather than structural issue.

1: The second year of production, 1972, brought several changes, some subtle, others less so

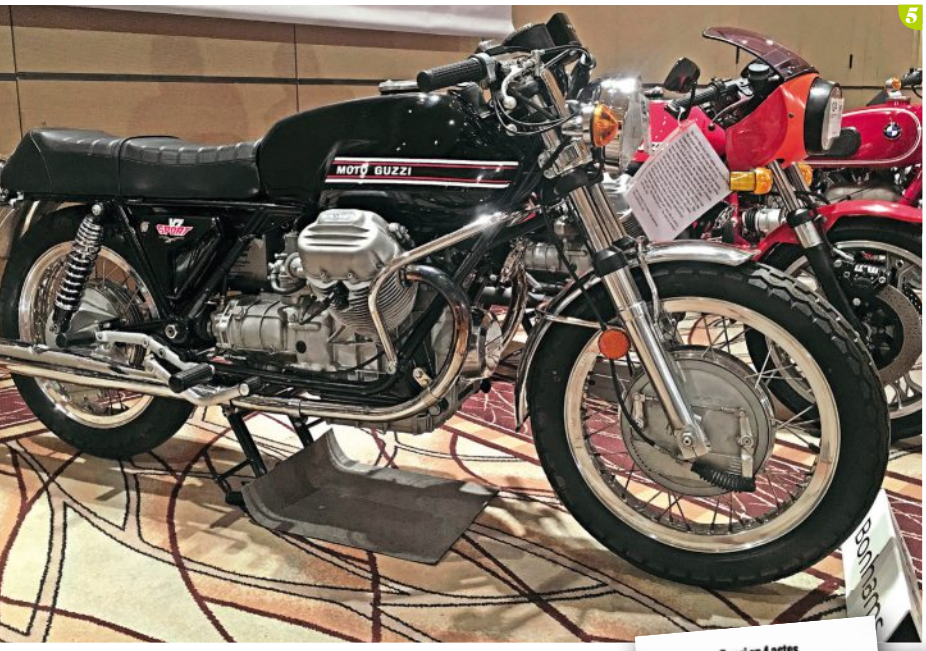
2: Glorious swan-neck clip-on handlebars

3: 1972 also saw major expenditure, including new die-cast cases for the engine, transmission, cylinder heads and rocker boxes

4: Moto Guzzi's beautiful – and considerably effective – double-sided 2ls front anchor

Major changes occurred in 1973 with the arrival of new owner Alejandro de Tomaso. The new owner lowered production costs with a streamlining effort starting with bikes that carry the VK14000 prefix. Refinements to the crankcase and gearbox were made, which boosted durability and improved sealing, but sprockets and chain replaced the Sport's upscale gearset timing. A poorly executed tensioning device added insult to injury. Looming industry regulation

4



5: 1973 now, and development continues

6: Internal changes included replacing the timing gears with a chain – with a weak tensioner, which did not help

7: More obviously, the exhausts were linked by a pair of cross tubes running beneath the power plant

Bottom: A 1973 machine with obvious mods to improve its street racer image

meant that some bikes exported to the USA used a crossover gearshift linkage to move the lever to the other side.

Otherwise it was unchanged, save for lighting and instrument details. Colour options for 1973 used silver or black topped with black, red or green bodies and even a royal blue for UK buyers. Disc brakes were reported as optional, and Guzzi's factory special-order programme saw tuned versions reworked into 850cc using a modified Eldorado crankshaft.

Second generation V7s definitely do not command the same prices as the 1971 originals, but they are popular enough that many people now choose to import clean examples to the UK from the Continent. You'll find them advertised internationally – a typical 1972 standard V7 in full working order with 40,000km on its clock will cost around £13,000 in Italy – plus shipping and import taxes, so budget at least £15k.

1974 750S

Third production / VK 1 designation / 748cc / 495lb / 120mph

WITH PLANS TO bring Benelli and Moto Guzzi together for a series of badge-engineered multis, the numbers showed that the 2V twin was De Tomaso's only profitable motorcycle. The decision to close Mandello's special projects shop in 1972 seems to support his belief that the Sport had no future, translating into a matching figure set aside for development. Considerable money was invested on the new V1000 tourer, decked out with luggage and a two-speed automatic transmission. It sold poorly, but founded a four-decade production using the five-speed transmission instead.

Always keen on trusting trends, De Tomaso's 750S gained bold new graphics and chassis updates that joined revisions found in the last V7S series. These include the high output 748cc twin (still with that chrome bore) using the Sport cam, 41/36mm diameter valves and 30mm Dell'Orto VHB carburettors. A major player in the great disc brake movement of 1974, the original 4ls drum gave way to twin 300mm Brembo cast iron discs and matching dual-piston calipers. The rear brake carried over and thus the 750S did not use Guzzi's patented linked brakes, still a year away. Suspensions again consisted of Guzzi's sealed damper forks, steering damper and twin Konis.

Standardised left-side shifting was finalised in later production. Other new-for-1974 features include a one-and-a-half bum-stop saddle, larger T-type toolbox covers and Silentium shark-gill mufflers in flat black. Those distinctive slash graphics on the tank and side panels have since become a Guzzi trademark. Mostly sprayed black (some in red) the stripes were available in red, green or orange. Happily, the 750S retained the adjustable clip-ons and glovebox storage light.

Below: The 1974 750S, complete with trademark twin discs up front, and a pair of black Silentium 'shark-gill' silencers

1: 1974 found the 750S offered in the US as the V7 Sport. But what's in a name, apart from buyer bait?

2 & 3: Although the startling green might raise an eyebrow or two, underneath it all lives that classic 750 lump. With leaky carbs…

Berliner's request that the 750S be sent stateside as a continuation of the V7 Sport was a safe move. With demand outlasting supply, the decision was made not to risk additional pain by delivering a motorcycle the customer didn't order. Following delivery of a small number of drum brake V7 Sports early in the year, the US-spec for 1974 was indeed a 750S with different paint and side covers. Built from the VK14000/timing chain blueprint, the chassis gained 300mm Brembo discs, and almost all were finished in black over black – by far the most requested colour combination. The American version fits a larger CEV tail lamp and raised badges.

Two US publications tested the Sport in its last year of production, both from the previous batch but fitted with 220mm drum and gear timing. From inception, the V7 Sport was something of a press darling, often billed as a true exotic. In finish and performance the 750S was affected little by production cost-cutting.

Recognised as a mid-stream modern classic, its value has jumped as a single-year model with just over 1000 made. One recently imported to the UK was offered for sale by a dealer with all its NOVA paperwork at £10,750. For many, the 750S is significantly more desirable than the heavier, slower S3 model that succeeded it.

1975 S3

Fourth production / VK 2 designation / 748cc / 500lb / 115mph

Above: By 1975, the introduction of the 750 S3, a machine that may be the most stunning machine from a line of stunners, perhaps Guzzi's best work as a stylist…'

4: At last, three discs and a standardised right brake

5: Brembo's famous calipers, the brakes that defined fine stopping in a less grippy era

HISTORICALLY USED AS an example of De Tomaso's cheapening of the brand, the 750 S3 for 1975 lost its gear timing drive, adjustable clip-ons and Sport camshaft – and even the twist starter. This was all part of De Tomaso's challenge in trying to turn a profit, something Moto Guzzi had not done. The V7 Sport's elaborate parts and special fittings were neither cheap nor easy. But that's the point. Looking to double production numbers using the modular method of spreading different kinds of frosting over the same basic cake, refinements to the later sport models suggest that De Tomaso tried to modernise to broader methods of mass production. This shift from sporting exclusivity offends many enthusiasts, but amid all the criticisms they tend to miss the steady stream of improvements made to the whole line to boost durability and performance. Sold at home and abroad to major destinations like Germany, France, Holland and the UK, the S3's final production tally of 980-odd units guarantees exclusivity.

Bolted inside the S3's frame was the new 850 T3 block, recently updated with an internal oil filter. Over this went modified 82.5mm chrome bore barrels and the short-throw 70mm crank. The cylinder heads matched, but again with the 750's valves, pistons and carbs fitted. Studs and nuts fasten the exhausts instead of threaded collars. The V1000's softer cam and ignition robbed the engine of some zing, but the rest comes together with those distinctive Sport-only radiused headers, dual crossover and offsetting mufflers. Another new casting, the bevel housing, became a production mainstay for decades and inside, the 8:33 pinion combined with slightly revised primary gearing for improved shifting.

A single 242mm Brembo rear disc and caliper joined the twin 300mm rotors in Guzzi's linked braking system, with the proportioning valve located ahead of the left shock. Steel V1000 panels cover the coils and rear master cylinder, the two boxes replaced by an under-seat tray. New handlebar switches carried over to the new Le Mans 850.

Visually, the S3 may be the most stunning machine from a line of stunners, perhaps Guzzi's best work as a stylist. And like its predecessors, the last 750 Sport earned praise as a confidence-inspiring road carver. This means that the dedicated S3 owner won't lose a dime uprating the engine to proper Sport credentials, fitting timing gears or updating to drilled two-piece Le Mans rotors, as displayed on this example. Find a crashed survivor re-assembled with original parts and a wide variety of factory crossover pieces and you're in for a thriller – the S3 is a fiddler's favourite in the retro-fit game.

The V7 Sport in all its incarnations is an Italian classic, built to ride and constructed to endure. Even the least-admired final S3 edition earns honour for Moto Guzzi as a sporting, shaft-drive traveller – and for the classic enthusiast it's the most affordable of the bunch. In ready to ride and unrestored condition, you'll pay around £8000 for one. CBG

Below: A golden age for lovers of Italy's always charismatic motorcycles. 1975 Moto Guzzi S3 lines up with a 1974 Laverda SF 750 and a 1974 MV 750S. You choose…

SPECIAL THANKS
Seth Dorfler, Moe Moore, Joe Caruso and Emilio Sorondo

SPECIFICATIONS 1971 TO 1975

ENGINE: 748cc 2c air-cooled twin **TRANSMISSION:** Five-speed constant mesh
TRANSFER: Twin-plate dry clutch, shaft drive **POWER RATING:** 70bhp @ 7000rpm
CHASSIS: Double cradle with removable rails, chrome moly in 1971. **FORKS:** Moto Guzzi sealed damper **SHOCKS:** Koni or Sebac **WHEELS:** 18in Borrani alloy, 3.25in front, 3.50in rear
FRONT BRAKES: 220mm Moto Guzzi 4LS drum, two-300mm discs after 1974
REAR BRAKE: 220mm Moto Guzzi 2LS drum, one-242mm disc in 1975
WEIGHT: 495lb wet, approximately 510lb after 1971 **TOP SPEED:** 125mph (1971)

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Serial Kettle restorer

Meet Mark Read, a bike builder who knows which bikes he likes best

WORDS BY ROB DAVIES **PICTURES BY** MARK READ

1: Where it all started. Mark Read and his Kettle, back in 1982

2: The Black A model that became the 'red' bike after restoration. Lots of lovely rust due to weather. Mudguards are pretty good but will require rechroming

3: Features of the later A model: the plain plastic radiator sides, cooling badge on the barrels, re-styled side panels, chrome chainguard and covers to the airbox

THEY SAY THAT you never forget your first love – and that applies to women too. For me and one or two others, when it comes to their first great bike it's the Suzuki GT750 every time. This is no great surprise for those of us who remember the 1970s, because the Kettle is one of the iconic bikes of the age.

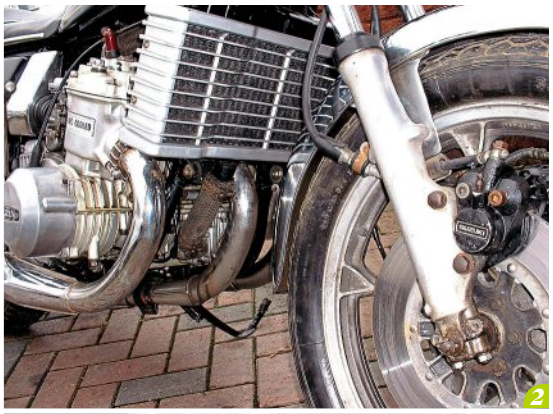
When I bought my red kettle in 1978, it was so wonderfully different from all the Brit bikes I had owned before. It had colourful lights on a proper dash – green for neutral and red for the gear indicator – an electric start that never failed, with a little black button to push. It had a radiator, just like a car, which in that day was a real novelty. And it went like smoke, which is exactly what it did when you really opened the throttle – but who talked about and even cared about global warming and petrol prices back in those days, eh?

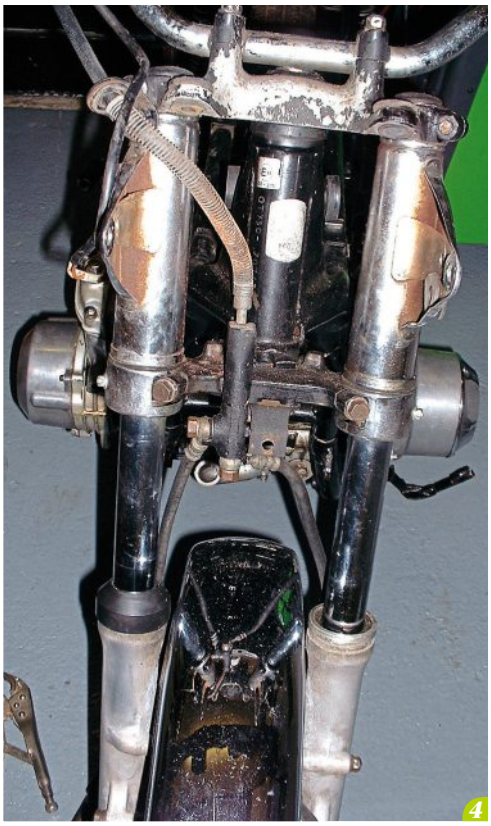
But I'm not here to talk about my GT750, oh no. This month we are looking at four perfect examples of GT750s that Mark Read has restored over the last six or seven years – and you have to ask why, because he had one when he was aged 19 too.

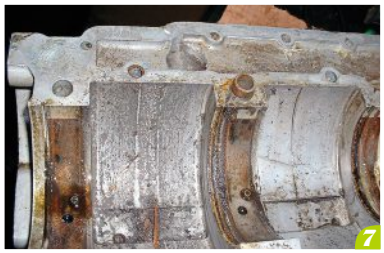
CBG: Mark, tell us all about your introduction to the GT750.

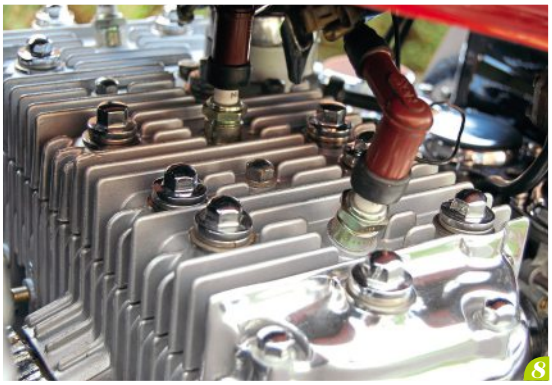
Mark: I was on an advanced motorcycling course – there was no CBT in those days. My instructor told me that if I passed, I could have a go on his Suzuki. I duly passed, and had a go, and I knew from that day on that I would have to get myself a Kettle. Sometime later I did get hold of an A model, but it was via an unusual and unexpected route.

I had not long built a chopped Triumph, and when I rode it I wasn't all that keen on it. Then a friend came round on his Suzuki GT. He preferred my Triumph, while I much preferred his 1976 P-reg Kettle, so we did a swap. Both of us were happy – but me probably more so. I loved that bike, and kept it well maintained for the next 16 years – it never did require an engine rebuild. During those years I really got to know the bike, like you do when you get to do all the regular maintenance jobs on the engine and brakes. Sometime later I foolishly sold it for a faster









sports job. I really wish I hadn't, and years later I was scouring eBay in the hope that I could get it back. I would have paid anything – really!

CBG: The years go by and you decide that you're going to restore one; the first of several?

Mark: Exactly. It was 2009. I had time to spare during the winter so I paid about £2000 for an A model from eBay. The A model – just to unconfuse readers – was one of the later models, because the range started off with the letter J in 1972, and went through to M before going back to A in 1976, with the last B model in the following year. Glad we've cleared that up.

The seller told me that the engine was good, and indeed it sounded okay. But I hadn't had it long when it totally seized – and I mean rock solid. So that was the impetus to take everything apart for a total rebuild. It was only when I started taking bits off that I discovered the cause of the seizure. Often with these engines it's because water has gone past one of the crankcase seals from the cooling system, and then your big ends have had it. But in this case it was simple error. The previous owner had been messing about with the bike's side panels and had trapped the rubber tube that takes oil from the two-stroke tank to the engine – an engine deprived of oil doesn't last long, either. Having said that, it's just as well I stripped it because water had been getting through to the crank, so seizure was just a matter of time.

Once the engine was in pieces I sent the frame for coating to Powder Coatings of Tyburn, Birmingham, where they did a good job. The engine went through the usual clean-up, then a regrind, rebore, new pistons – which I found on eBay, often the cheapest place. The old wiring had had it, and you can get a whole host of problems trying to get a tatty wiring system to work. Besides, a front and rear loom is only about £100, so why go through all that trouble?

4: The front of the bike was pretty grim. Only a brave man can see the potential in a bike like this

5: Under the seat the condition is fair, but everything will need attention in the cleaning and painting department

6: The old wiring loom will go, and the condition of the head and engine cases will need much cleaning and polishing to make this bike look like new again

7: When the crankcases came apart, the extent of water intrusion could clearly be seen

8: What a difference after soda blasting and vibro finishing. Those head bolts cost £13 each to replace…

Left: One polished K Model engine. Note the water connection at the top

1: A seat that opens with a clip is always useful, making the battery and two-stroke oil filler easy to get at.

2: Close-up of the twin disc and caliper arrangement. Mudguards have chromed well

3: Earlier model with metal brake pipes

4: Oodles of chrome and polished aluminium were the thing in the Seventies, a time of great bling. Time and money consuming to restore decently

5: Solid discs are always a clue to an older bike, and you can see why the three-into-four exhaust is so expensive to get hold of. New Hagon rear shocks have improved the suspension and handling

Right: Rechromed rims with the proper butted stainless spokes. Rims and tyres tended to be slim in the Seventies; wheels and their tyres got wider as the years went by

***CBG*:** You say the black bike became the red, and you had an extra treatment that I haven't heard of following the soda blast?

Mark: As you can see from the pictures, the 1976 A model – a P-reg – was black when I bought it and in a pretty bad way, especially the front end and forks. To the best of my knowledge I don't think that the GT750 ever came in black, certainly not that model, and I much prefer the Candy Red. I guess that over the 40-odd years of its life, it just got sprayed with different cans and ended up black, but I have no idea what the bike's original colour was. As for the inner crankcases and the barrels, after they were soda blasted I had them vibro finished. For this they go into a vibrating tub with carbide balls. The cleaned surface is then peened over, and it takes a lot to mark it after that.

***CBG*:** But you sold it. Why on earth did you do that after all that work?

Mark: I was justly proud of that bike, so I took it to the show at Stafford to show it off – as you do – and I was amazed that there was so much interest in it. I went there with no intention of selling it, but I

popped a 'for sale' note on it, and it was snapped up pretty quickly. I knew then that I would have to start again with another. On the plus side, I had made a profit, and learned so much from that build that I was looking forward keenly to the next one.

CBG: The next year you started on your second Kettle, a Candy Gold 1973 K model. Are there many differences between the bikes?

Mark: There were quite a few changes over the years, such as the introduction of a digital gear display, and don't forget that later bikes were the first to have twin discs. But many of the changes are not easily distinguishable, such as alterations in gearing and power output. The earlier models in 1973 didn't have the metal pipes going to the front discs that the later bikes had. There is no 'liquid-cooled' badge on the barrels either, and some models had black tipped exhausts.

The airbox altered over the years, as did the way the carburettors fitted. The early carbs were individually mounted, but the later carbs were all on a rack. Also the rubber gaiters on the front forks disappeared, as did the flap along the centre of the fuel tank; those are just a few of the changes, besides the usual cosmetic ones like colour.

CBG: In 2014 you started another 1973 K model in blue and white. Is there something special about the K models or was that just what was available?

Mark: Again the bike was pretty rough, but once I had the frame back I started with the two-part loom, putting that into place. I know some builders finish with the loom, but you can also start by fitting it to the electrics. Imperial Polishing at Cradley Heath made a fine job of all the alloy engine covers, and as usual I had all the chromework rechromed – there's a lot on a GT750 – at AC Howells in Walsall. They are expensive but excellent. Chris Appleby Engineering (Essex) provided a new crank, while Pete Lovell Engineering of Smethwick (specialises in Nortons)

6: Crash bars protecting the radiator from drop damage were essential as the gold bike goes back together

7: Stripped frame for the next Candy Gold K model

8: Individual carbs on the K, and black tips to the exhaust. Restyled side panels with louvres

9: Zinc plating to the kick-start shaft and gear shaft is important if you don't want any scruffy bits to spoil the general shiny look

1: The condition of the blue K model when it arrived. And is that a purple side cover?

2: For authenticity, all stickers need to be sourced and replaced

3: Re-assembly of the blue K is well underway

4: Complete on the bench, and ready for engine trials. Always the exciting bit

5: Great paint by MotoPaint. Chrome headlight brackets and headlight rim on this model

did the rebore. There are quite a few of the A and B models around, and they are good bikes. This K model was a US bike I bought from Worcester-based Classic Bike Imports. The K model is the rarest one, and probably the hardest to restore faithfully because sourcing the parts is time consuming and as frustratingly hard as the build. Take the distinctive three-into-four exhaust for instance; you can get reasonable replicas for the M, A and B, but none for the K – so you have to go with genuine parts.

There are four main parts to the exhaust system – the left and right downpipes that come with their own silencer; the centre downpipe that has a stub for the two smaller silencers and the two lower silencers themselves, which are made in one piece. It took me years of eBay searching for these alone, with one section coming from Australia – plus shipping costs – and you have to take these into account when you tot everything up at the end of the build. I think that K exhaust system alone cost me £1200. And yes, you can get an exhaust re-chromed, but it will probably wreck the internal baffles that are so important to the working – and the sound – of a two-stroke.

Other parts that are hard to get are the radiator side covers, rigid brake pipes, switchgear and the later chrome chainguard. But probably the most difficult item to find is the cast alloy front brake master cylinder. The late plastic reservoir will do the job, but it's just not 'right'. A good second-hand one will go for £150-200. I bought a tatty one for £60 and used a rebuild kit, then painted the exterior. Switchgear is also rare, so I powder coat the bodies and give the contacts a good clean and polish. Nevertheless, the K is also my favourite and possibly the most sought-after.

CBG: And finally you restored the early J 1972 pink one!

Mark: That's not pink that's magenta – at least that's the joke anyway.

CBG: Actually I have always rather liked that colour...

Mark: Me too, and as this is one of the early models it has the twin leading shoe drum brake – a very desirable and beautiful piece of equipment, but sadly not as effective for all that weight and speed as the later twin front disc arrangements. There are no 'liquid-cooled' badges on the polished barrels, and there are painted side panels to the radiator where later bikes are chrome.

Just a few important points about the engine rebuild – it's vital to use genuine Suzuki seals at the crankcase, and make sure on installation that they are pushed well away from the main bearings so that they don't get quickly ruined. Another 'must do' is the water pump. These can be bought from Suzuki for around £190, but I get mine from Paul Miller in the US for £90 (millersvintage.com). They specialise in parts that are hard to find. The radiator has to be thoroughly cleaned on the inside before you do anything else to it. Always fit new water hoses throughout – plus a radiator temperature sensor and thermostat to be on the safe side. I use an early Mazda 626 sensor for £12 instead of £35 from Suzuki; and a Rover 414 thermostat for £10 instead of another £35. Carburettors can be rebuilt using the Keyster Kits, but make sure they are the latest ones, as the early kits weren't so hot.

On all the bikes the clocks were completely stripped down, cleaned and repainted and the mileage zeroed. The internal mechanism was greased and new silicon damper fluid was added to the pots. Clock glass was replaced with new, while the covers were rechromed with new stainless screws. There are new stainless clock mounting bolts, and the housing bracket was repainted. Plus a new ignition switch with a stainless ring around it. These may be small features but they are really important if you want to give the bike that new look – otherwise they look scruffy and stand out like a sore thumb.

CBG: That's a lot of work, Mark, and I daresay that the list of jobs was even more extensive, with no expense spared?

Mark: I won't relate the whole list, but certainly all the bolts need re-zincing. The airbox had to be stripped, cleaned and fitted with a new filter. The petrol tanks need chemically cleaning and treating internally before you even think about sending them for painting. So yes, every part requires its own individual attention. But then, when the whole bike is back together again, looking like it's just come out of the showroom, it just gives you so much pleasure.

CBG: Your Kettle rebuilding has led you into a new sideline. Tell us a little about that.

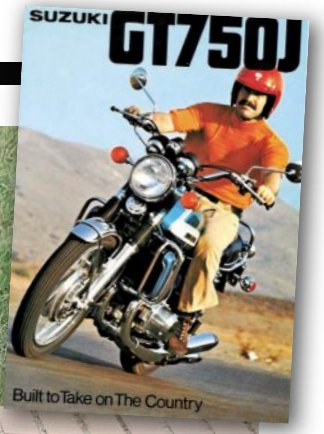
6: Beautifully presented headlight and clock arrangement on the J model

7: Choke lever was on the handlebar on J models. On later bikes it was near the carbs

8: Rubber gaiters on the J, and painted side panels to the radiator

9: Individual carbs and not on a rack

10: Stylish side view of the 'magenta' bike, with the electrically operated radiator fan in black (this hardly ever came on in practice as the rad was so effective). It was controlled from the thermostat at the top of the engine



Mark: On one of the bikes I decided I wanted to fit a new set of head bolts. There are 11 altogether, and Suzuki wanted £13 per bolt, which doesn't take a great mathematician to realise that this alone is a costly purchase. So I asked a friend of mine, who has an engineering firm, to make me 11 bolts. Well, he made me 22 – just in case. So when I was left with a spare set, instead of throwing them into a tray on the shelf, I put them on eBay and sold them for £90. I realised very quickly that there is a market for some hard-to-get spares – especially bolts and stuff. So I started with head bolts, and expanded that to other Suzuki parts, and now we have started to do some Kawasaki bits and pieces, all on eBay.

- **1:** At last. Ready for the road
- **2:** Only a plastic chainguard for the J Model, but black tips to the exhausts.
- **3:** The clocks of the early J Model, complete with the first water temperature gauge for a production motorcycle
- **4:** Clock and controls of the later L, M, A and B models with different lights and gear indicator
- **5:** The Suzuki tank badges were a push fit (though some had screws) into two small clips that were recessed into the tank. You need to be very careful when prising them away for painting

***CBG*:** Sounds good – we wish you all the best!

After finishing this article, I thought I would peruse eBay to see what was the latest on the Kettle front. I found quite a nice one at the Worcester-based importers that was ready for rebuilding. It ran and looked okay and cost £2999. There was a really rough one with a seized engine, and the asking price for that was £2500! I would have loved to know whether they got that for it – but you can never tell these days.

Then there was a totally rebuilt bike for an amazing £14,995, and it didn't take long to find a couple of anomalies (a wrong mudguard was one) so you do wonder how many more little mistakes there could be from what should be original – but maybe I'm being too picky! CBG

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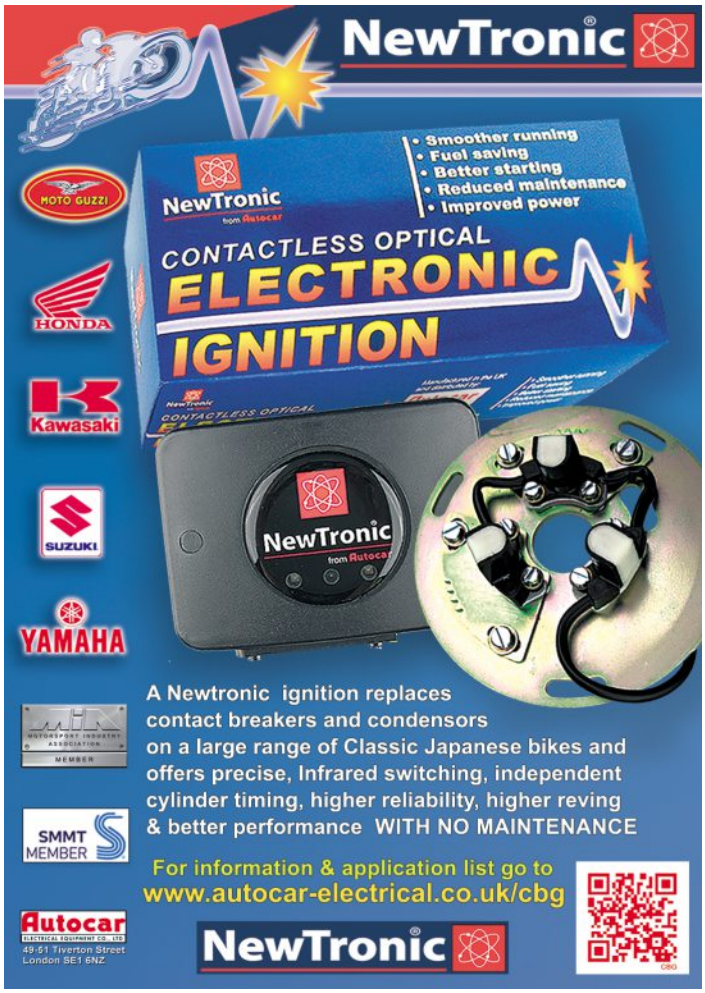


Wiring looming

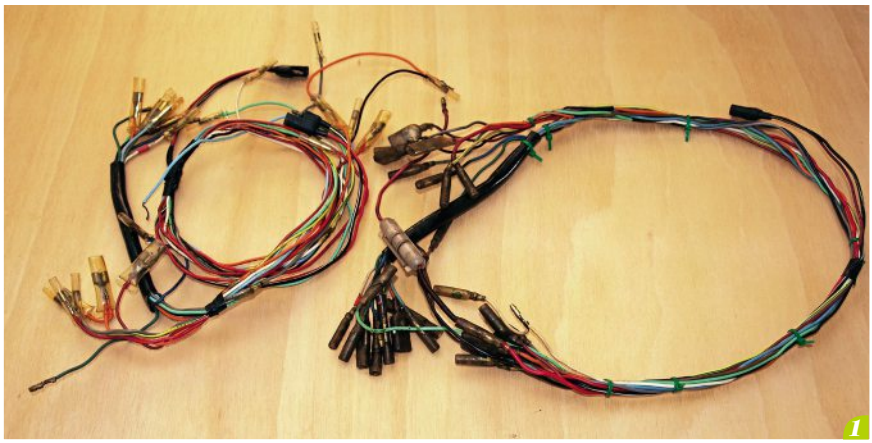
Wiring gone west? Looks like it's time for a new loom. Here's how to do it

WORDS & PHOTOS BY STEVE COOPER

FOR MANY OF us the concept of electricity is something of a black art. Yes, most of us get V=IR and the basics thereof we learned at school, but beyond that it often all gets a wee bit messy. Now add in a serried panoply of coloured wires, decaying insulating tape, several decades of road dirt, oil and heaven knows what else and the harness fitted to your old classic can be a something of a challenge.

Most motorcycle wiring looms were never intended to have the life spans we presume upon them; 10 years, 15 at most. Vehicles of the previous century were supposed to be scrap. Yet here we are, nearly two decades through the next century still expecting corroded connectors, decrepit copper and intransigent insulation to do their jobs with neither complaint nor issue. Grasp the simple fact that we, the owners, don't function as well as we did 30 years ago and you begin to see the cracks in both our hopeful expectations and the wiring systems of our beloved bikes. Something has to give and it's very often frayed wire or dodgy terminal.

Of course you could 'simply splice in a length of suitable replacement wiring'... yeah, sure. We've all tried that one and it only perpetuates another issue elsewhere. If there's a New Old Stock loom then it's almost child's play to fit it. Sadly some of the pattern looms out there seem to be based on a knitting pattern rather than a wiring diagram. And if you happen to own something as perversely disturbing as a Suzuki Stinger (aka T125) then you'll already know that the only loom that replaces the old one will be the one you make yourself! Oh well, in for a penny etc.!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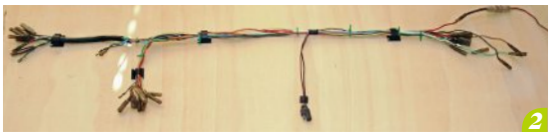
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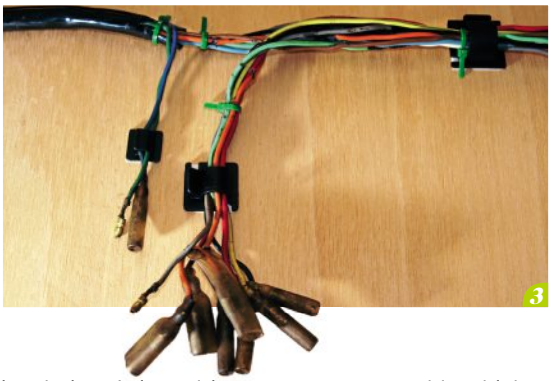
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Analogue or homologue?

Before we start crocheting various wires it's a good idea to look at what you have and question whether it can be improved. In almost every instance the answer is yes. Most looms were made down to a price where every sliver of cheeseparing saved a fraction of a yen/penny/cent/lira/mark (delete as applicable). Understand that most wiring and electrical systems fail due to poor, insufficient or decayed earths and you can see where improvements can and should be made. A set of greasy headstock bearings is not conducive to returning the headlight's current back to the frame. Ditto the bolts of your rear mudguard/rear light or those headlamp brackets that are painted, rubber mounted and only just about make contact with the forks… which will be why your indicators probably don't flash too well! Simply establishing a decent earth (aka the return path) will allow your bike's electrics to work to their best of their ability. It's normally an easy task to add in a few extra earth wires to a home-built loom so why not do it?

The other simple upgrade is to opt for modern thin wall cable. I can't put it better than Vehicle Wiring Products, so I won't. Here's what they say: "Use a high performance cable which has thinner insulation. It is multi-stranded copper cable which is insulated with thinner hard grade PVC which offers good resistance to abrasion and cut-through. The cable also carries a higher load compared to the standard auto cable. Gives savings in weight and volume when used in large harnesses." Know that the experts use this type of cable and don't even consider anything old fashioned, period or archaic please. So then, we've decided that we'll make an analogue of the old loom?

You can replicate a new loom alongside the old one, but access can be tight and you'll still need to strip off sheathing and insulation to spot where joins and splices are located. Personally I prefer to check over the old loom in situ noting what goes where and how, along with connections to sub-assemblies and components. If a wire changes colour for any reason verify this against a factory wiring diagram; many an old loom has been bodged with God knows what. Removing old sheathing is hard work using cutters and patience. Old insulation tape is sticky and desperately unpleasant stuff, so be prepared to get messy. Hosing the exposed loom down with brake cleaner normally evicts most of the gloop. Even if the old wiring looks decent enough it won't be, trust me on this! Mounting it on suitable board via clips it should be possible

1: Two old looms, neither particularly attractive!

2: Denuded of protection and cleaned, the wiring is ready for examination

3: Straightened and captive, a loom is much easier to examine

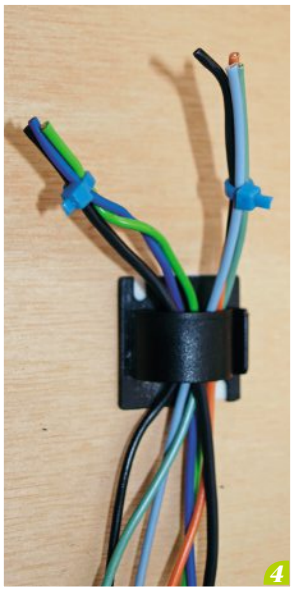
4: Start on something simple, then

5: Measure twice, cut once!

6: Group and collate each bunch of related wires

7: Use different coloured cable ties to differentiate between groups of wires

8: Eventually you should end up with something like this. Eventually…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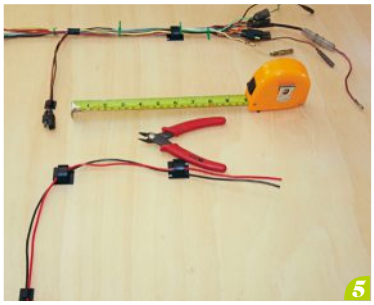
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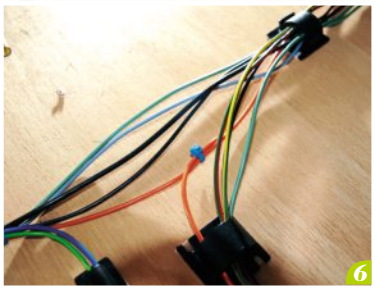
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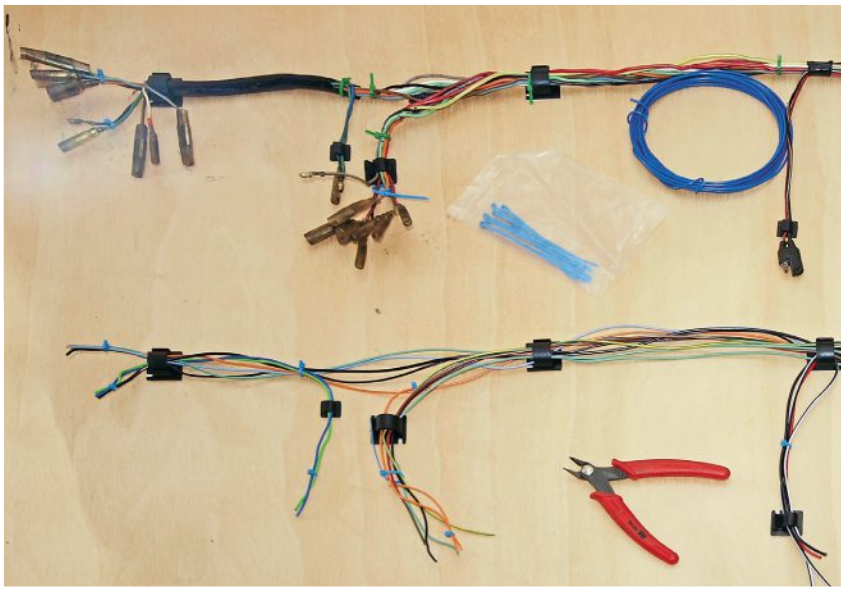
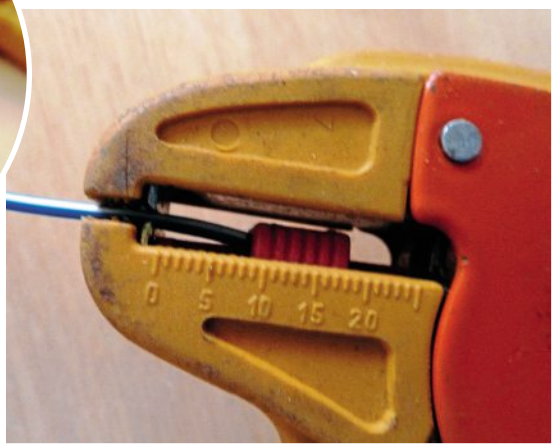


Above: The wire ends are often open too wide for the crimper's jaws so give them a pinch



Right: Use a purpose made wire stripper and nothing else

to determine what goes where and how.

Looms have a mind of their own, both when in use and when laid out for all to see their failings. They are cussed malevolent devices and need to be treated accordingly. Using adjustable, self-adhesive, wiring clips from a recommended supplier or even eBay puts the owner in control. With the old, denuded, loom in approximate position stretch it out and tighten the clamps sufficiently to hold it in place… you are now in control of the situation. From here the job is relatively simple and you'll just need to replicate the old loom in new wire with some more wiring clips to hold everything loosely together.

Small cable ties come in really handy to temporarily grip bunches of wires together; mine are local DIY shop, £1 for eight packs, cheapos and do the job admirably well.

If you intend to simply copy the old loom and not add in extra earths, then you can start crimping connectors onto the loom now. Personally I only add the minimum necessary at this stage where sleeving needs to be in place. Most terminals and connectors get affixed once the loom is in place, adjusted, tweaked and settled in. Additional earths often require some manipulation so get installed as just cut wires at this stage.

Making connections

For almost every application it's bullet or spade terminals and buying them in bulk is the sensible option. Avoid pre-insulated connectors; they always look untidy and often aren't crimped hard enough. As it's a T125 Stinger on the bench, 3.9mm Japanese bullets are being used, along with the appropriate clear PVC insulators. To be honest, why would you use anything else?

Decent wire strippers are a must. Invest in some and play around with them on scraps of wire until you've mastered both their operation and any adjustments and/or pre-tensioning. You'll also need a quality set of crimpers and again practice off-line before attempting the real thing.

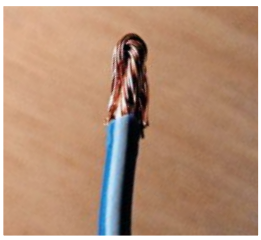
Many connectors benefit from a little tweaking prior to crimping and a gentle compression allows them to fit into the crimpers perfectly. Thin wire is best stripped back double its length and then folded over. This ensures that the crimped connector has something substantial to bite on. Connectors apply grip in two places; at the stripped copper and at the insulation. Both need to be properly held to ensure a decent connection. Practice makes perfect and 20 minutes spent with a handful of connectors and some offcuts of wire will pay manifold dividends on the real job.

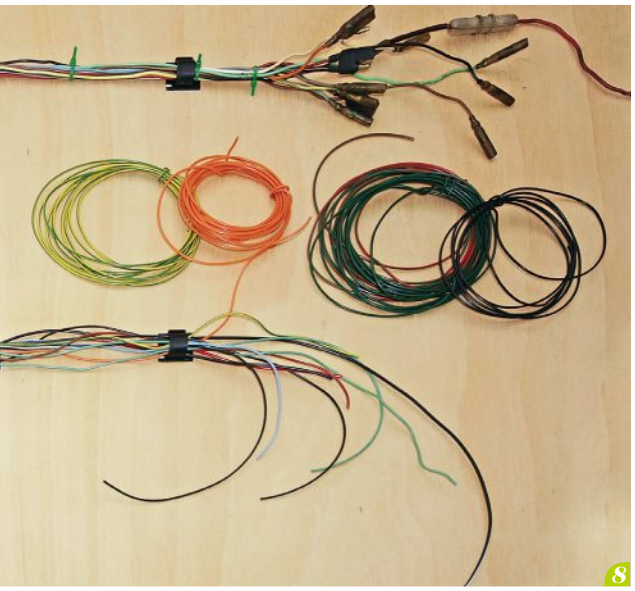
Above: Strip back double length for thin wires

Below: A folded thin wire will adequately fill the space available.

9: Always use the correct register for the terminal

10: Insulation and bare wire both properly crimped. A little excess copper suggests we reduce the length of the strip-back next time





Joints and splices

Wiring looms or harnesses often have spliced joints – or flying leads – coming off them. This is an easy and cost effective way of taking power elsewhere without adding in a whole new wire. Fly leads are simple; just add an extra wire in the back of a connector pre-crimping then add the additional termination to the bare end of the fly lead. Spliced joints require a little more work and some soldering. Having located the site of the splice, the main wire is carefully trimmed of insulation with a sharp knife. The lead to be spliced in is stripped back then wrapped tightly around the bare splice. To secure the union a dab of electrical solder is applied and when cooled the soldered joint bound with insulation tape.

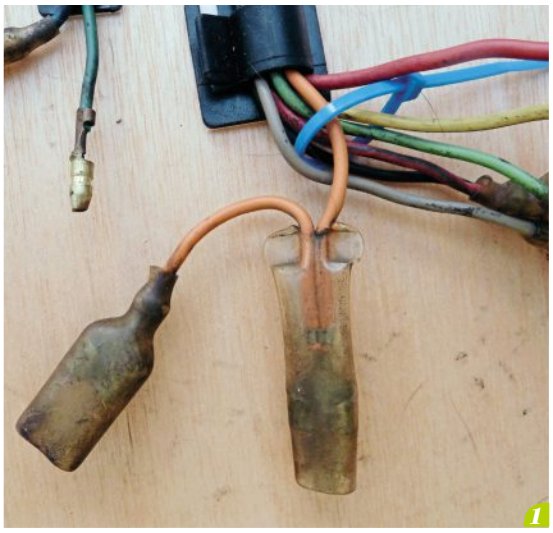
1: Old flying lead. This is what the original flying lead looked like

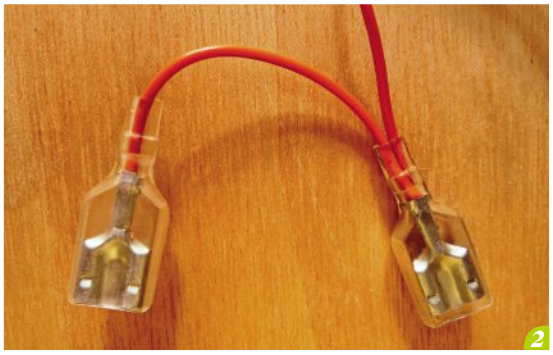
2: And now a modern version thereof

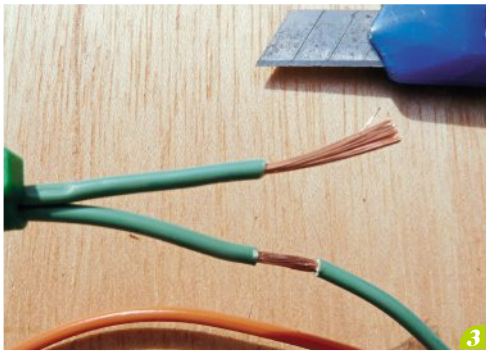
3: Trim the insulation off the main spliced wire, carefully avoiding damage to the copper strands.

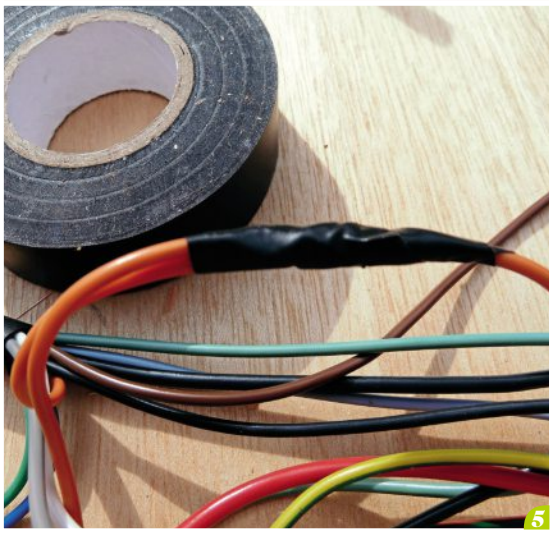
4: Wrap the flying lead around the main lead then solder

5: Ensure no stray wires of solder spikes present then wrap with tape









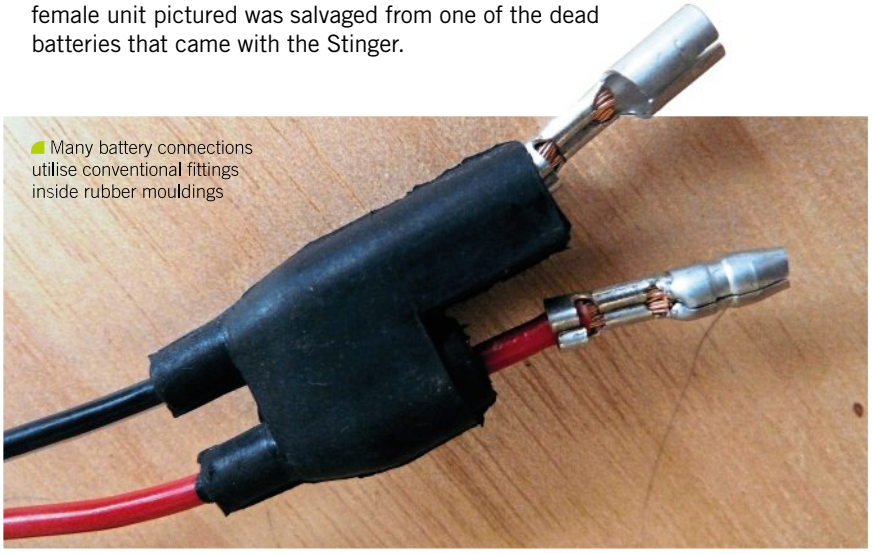
Singles to doubles or trebles

Where two or more wires connect to a common feed it's quite common for the manufacturer to buy in purpose-made fittings, and these are often nigh-on impossible to obtain. Fortunately most aftermarket suppliers offer alternative connectors even if their orientations may not be identical. It is truly very unlikely that the authenticity police will prosecute for the use of such substitutions!

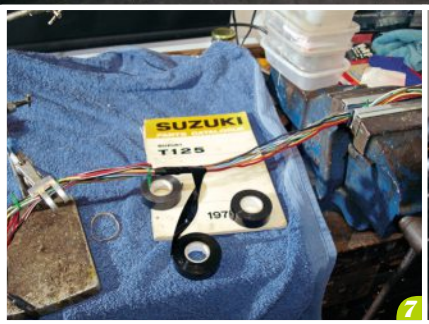
Battery fittings

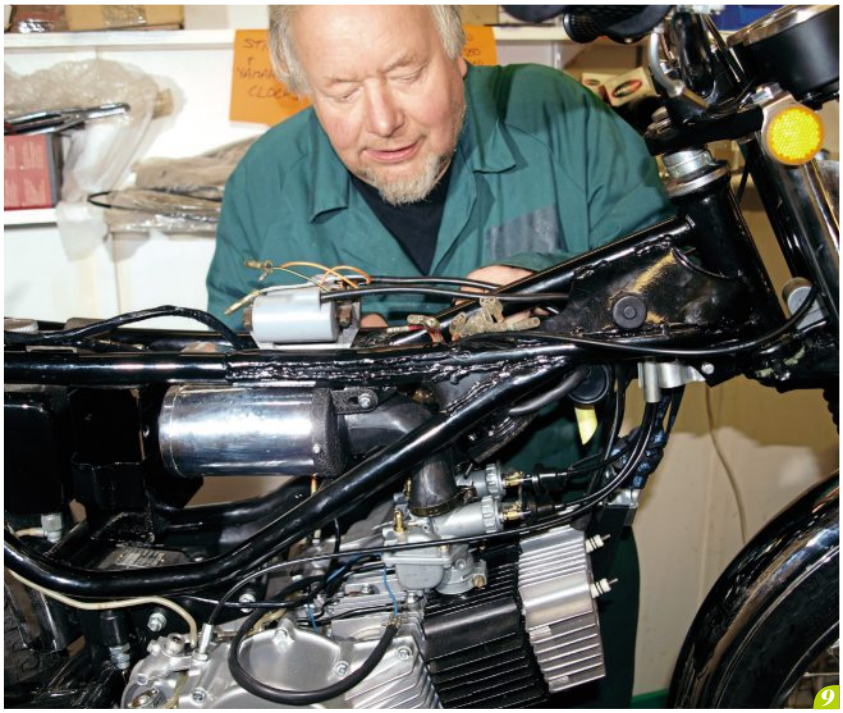
Many manufacturers used proprietary insulated fittings for the connection to the bike's battery. At first glance these may appear to be unsalvageable but inside the rubber moulding there's generally one of a number of standard fittings. Soaked in boiling water for five minutes, most rubber mouldings become much more compliant, thus facilitating repair and renovation. The male/female unit pictured was salvaged from one of the dead batteries that came with the Stinger.

OEM multiple female terminal and modern equivalents with insulating sleeves



Many battery connections utilise conventional fittings inside rubber mouldings





Sleeving and wrapping up

A fair indicator of a bodged wiring loom is the presence of yards of sticky insulation tape. Few manufacturers ever used anything but the absolute minimum of this noxious stuff. Flexible sleeving is fairly self-explanatory but may not necessarily be in the same size diameters as the OEM stuff. Unless you've got nothing better to do, go a size up rather than a size down; pulling too many wires through a narrow length of sleeving is a hellish way to pass the time! The bulk of a wiring loom is usually wrapped in non-adhesive PVC which allows the individual wires some room to move. The 'wrap' is normally started and finished with a short length of self-adhesive insulation tape but that's as far as the sticky stuff goes. Wrapping a harness or loom is a job best undertaken by two people, and ideally with one end of the loom somehow secured so it can't move. One pair of hands rolls out the binding while the other pair maintains tension in the bundle of wires being wrapped. It is possible to tie one end to the shed roof and hang a weight off the other to maintain tension. Having tried this, I can honestly say I'd rather put an octopus into a wetsuit!

6: Old loom top, new loom below and almost ready to fit

7: This way lies madness; get some help!

8: Solid earths are a good thing

9: Work the loom into the cramped areas first

Installation

Fitting a loom is only straightforward if you know exactly how the old one sat on the bike. This is why it always pays to take lots of pictures and make notes. Assuming you have a blueprint, lay the loom on the bike and start with the most obstructed area first. This way you have slack in the rest of the harness while you fight the most recalcitrant portions into place. With Satan's Stinger (which I'll learn to love one day…possibly!) I began with the battery connections and the regulator/rectifier simply because that's where the frame rails and fitting are the tightest.

Working from the centre to the front and rear means that you should be able to position the harness correctly and adjust as necessary without undue hassle. Almost without exception, wiring harnesses were fixed to frames using clips, rubber straps and/or cable ties of one kind or another, so use them please. They hold everything where it should be, avoid chafing through vibration and should stop you shutting your nice new harness under the seat hinge!

And, finally, don't forget to terminate and connect up those new earths. They make your bike's electrical system a much better place for volts and amps to inhabit with minimal resistance (ouch, sorry!). CBG

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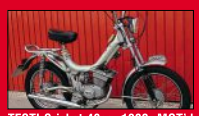
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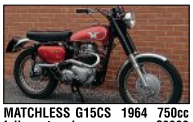
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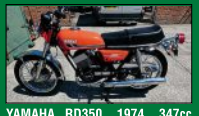
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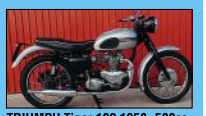
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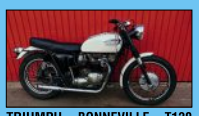
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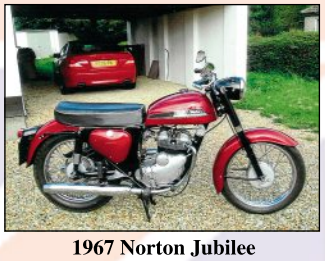

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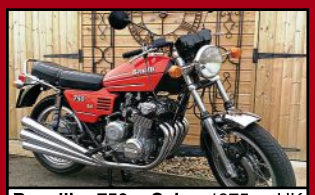

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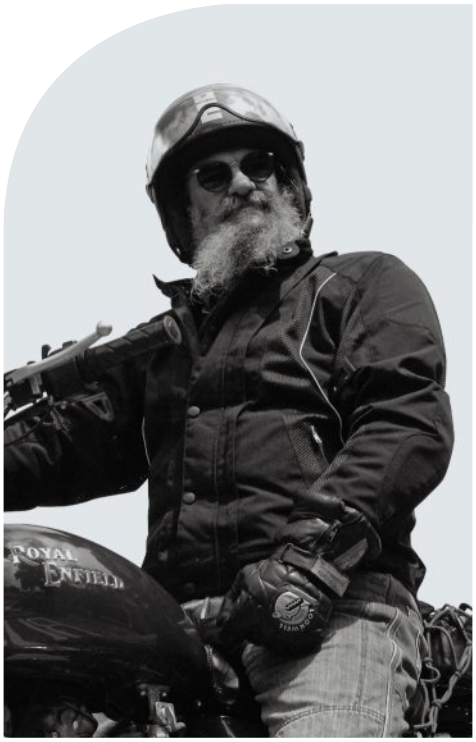

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Famous last words

Seller beware

BUYING A BIKE is easy. I mean … how hard is it to troll all the ads, verbal, physical and ethereal, find something you fancy, invent an excuse for buying it, sort out the dosh and sail gleefully through the haggling, lying and deceiving process until it's safely tucked up in your palatial motorhouse, ready for a bout of enthusiastic polishing, followed by a single solitary rain cloud and the soul-destroying decision to take the car anyway? What can possibly go wrong?

Honestly; what's the worst that can happen? You like it enough to ride it and keep it. Okay. That's an easy one. You ride it once, hate it, set fire to it and claim the insurance? That's another easy course of action. You ride it a few times, convinced that it will soon live up to the hype you sold yourself … it doesn't; it's no more ripping nor gripping than the bike you sold to pay for it, so you sell it again. Easy. Not. A. Problem. Happens to everyone, every day.

Caveat emptor, indeed? What exactly should the *emptor caveat*? That they've bought an atrocious pile of scrap for an outrageously insane price? That's life, my friend. We all do it and we always will. Few things defeat cold logic more easily than hot self-deception. Rather more worrying is the notion of *caveat venditor*. Oh yes.

Consider. For some reason – boredom, peer pressure, a fantasy that different somehow means better, a dream that a faster bike will make you a better rider – you've decided to ditch your bike. That's it. Decision made. To justify this, you needed to remind yourself of all its faults, frailties and feeblenesses, then you need to twist your conscience through a tight right angle so that you can ask – nay, demand! – top dollar for it. You mention proudly to your friends (optional) that you're getting rid of an old pile of scrap*/moving on a treasured personal friend and riding buddy* (*delete as appropriate) so that your already enviable life can be enhanced to undreamed-of levels by a shiny/muddy/faster/smoother/slower/younger/older model. The purpose of this pitiless posturing is to dip that scuffed leather-shod toe into the grimy waters of the marketplace. Do a dangle and see whether anyone bites.

Of course none of your friends wants it. They know the truth. But… they may pretend to want it, just to get your hopes up, to inflict Ordeal By Polishing upon you, only to pull out with a laugh and added ridicule just when you least expect it. This is what friends do. I know this. At least I would if I had any. No one selling a bike has any friends.

So you endure the awfulness of selling. You advertise it anywhere and everywhere that will accept ads for free. Then in a fit of sudden midnight desperation you even pay for ads in those places which claim to be inhabited by rich millionaires desperate to pay more for a bike simply because its oozing vendor chose to pay for an ad rather than simply being cheapskate and patient…

One of two things can happen. It sells or it doesn't. If it doesn't, there is only ever one reason: no one wants to pay what you're asking for it. You can dress this sad fact up in many different ways which do not involve blaming yourself, and you can ask less. This involves endless wearying delays, which might be a concern if you've borrowed the moolah to acquire your new dream bike and if there is domestic or financial pressure to ease that situation.

Or… to your surprise and delight, the machine sells instantly for your asking price. Ignore the future irritation that your phone, email and social media accounts will be clogged for several months – years, even – with desperate emptors, concentrate instead on the tear-jerking, hair-ripping understanding that you asked too little money. No one buys a bike instantly and for the top dollar asking price unless that price is … actually … not top dollar at all. You have intelligently ditched your P&J for washers! Just … washers! All your friends and family endlessly remind you of this so it must be true.

What to do? Whereas an unhappy buyer can simply ditch the thing on another witless dummy or return it to some hapless trader, you can't demand the speedy return of your dismally undervalued treasure horse from its entirely delighted new owner. Worse! Your mood will be so foul that your new Best Bike Ever will be as ashes under your bum. You'll hate it and will blame it for the presence of the grim sisters of grief and loss in your nightmares. *Caveat emptor*? I think not…

'What exactly should the emptor caveat? That they've bought an atrocious pile of scrap for an outrageously insane price? That's life, my friend…'

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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