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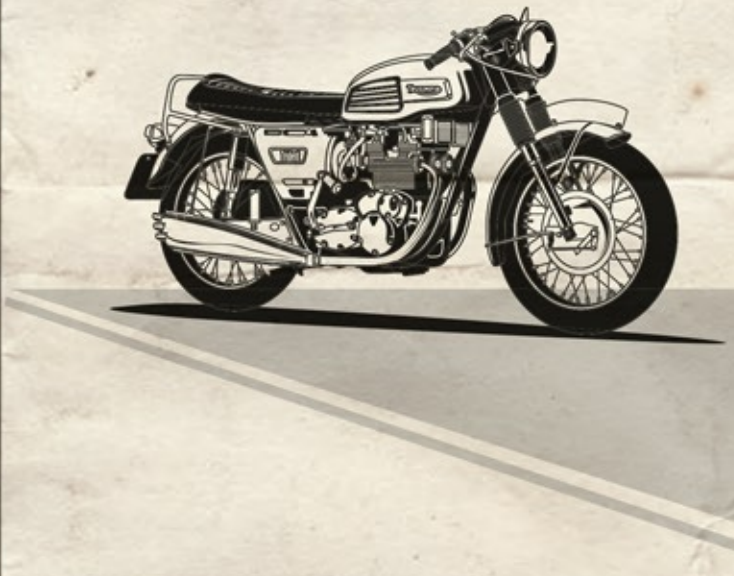
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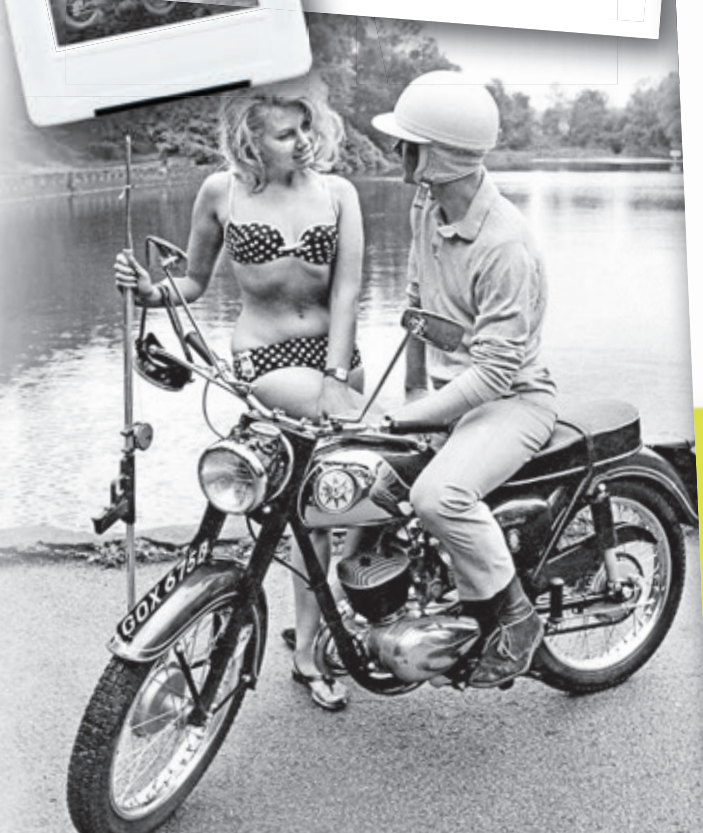
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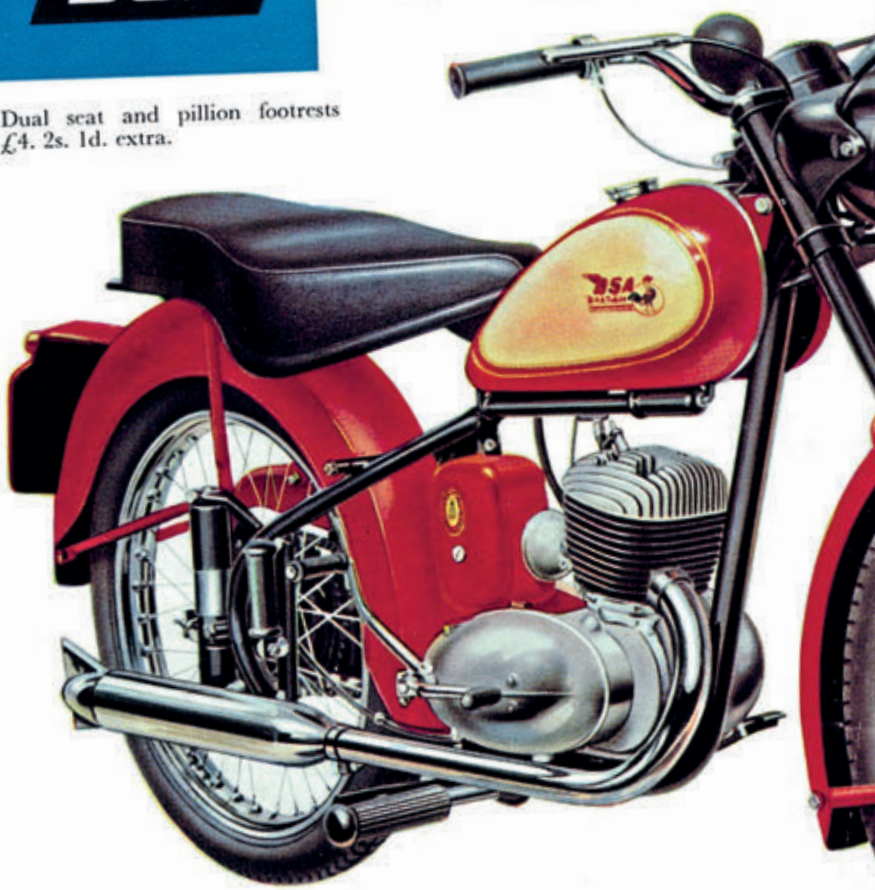




BSA

125 BANTAM MODE

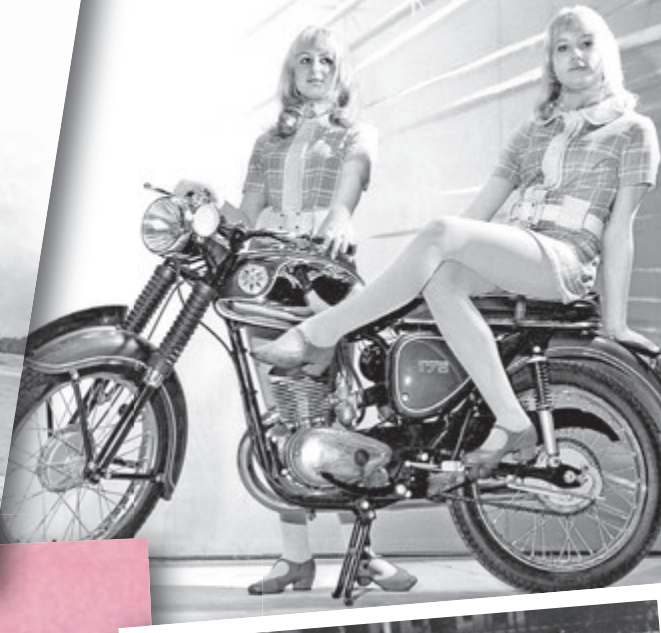
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Charming old world cottages at Welford-on-Avon.











Matt Hull
Grab the overalls and woolly hat

BLIMEY – IT'S cold outside. All too quickly, the nights are drawing in and the temperature is dropping like a valve on a botched downshift. So is it time to wrap the bikes up and dream of next spring? Well if you're like us at *CBG*, then fewer riding opportunities signal the busiest time of year – the beginning of 'The List'.

My List is the culmination of all those jobs you don't need or don't want to do while there is riding available. A good buddy of mine, Pete, once told me how he kept his Matchless so perfect. Not perfect as in shiny, scratch free and as new – though it is really clean – but how it rides like a new bike with a complete absence of squeaks or knocks, how all the cables are perfectly adjusted and it always starts first time – whether it's cold, hot or in between. His answer? "Only have one bike and never take it off the road. Do a job that you can finish in the time you have, like a weekend. So if you want to sort your forks and your head races, but can only find the time to do one, then do that and always, always put it back together. You may end up doing some of the same jobs again, but once that bike is off the road it'll become a project."

This simple statement struck a chord, as I cast a rather shameful eye around the workshop on a rare day off. The Starfire is superb and ready to ride, plus it's a great bike when the roads are a little iffy. But that's where the good news finishes. The racebike needs painting and a new loom. My CL 350 needs a new fuel tap and the rear light electrics repaired. The CB needs its carbs off and cleaned out, the BSA could do with the timing adjusted and headraces tightened, while the Honda Bros, the B40 and the Suzuki are in boxes. Somewhere. My brothers' bikes also need attention and I'm sure I owe them favours. And then there are the cars…

So my List is gaining an order, with the small jobs first to help gain momentum. And once they're finished, there's another list. A harder list. A list of what I'm going to keep and what needs to go. I'll admit, it feels impossible to just have one bike – can't define why, can't justify more than one, but one needs to be honest with oneself.

And time, that oh-so-precious of commodities, is always being asked of elsewhere. So to be kept, each bike will have to justify its place.

Is it fun, is it practical, does it excite? Living in Norfolk, the smaller bikes are great for the back lanes, but, being in Norfolk a distance-swallowing, mile-munching machine has its uses when you need to travel outside the county – or the 21st century, as some call it.

And then there's sentimental attachment. My racebike's an example - isn't worth that much, never will, but I've had it for 10 years and I know every nut, bolt and shim on it. And once painted it could look great in the dining room…

Looks like winter could be busy, so I'm glad of Charlie, my little helper. Be good.

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TEENAGERS, TELEGRAMS & TWO-STROKES

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‘What do you want to do when you grow up?’ It’s a question I was never allowed to answer truthfully during my mid-Seventies school years, as mother hated motorbikes.

One way to access two wheels was via the Post Office and the ‘super-cool’ vocation of the telegram boy. Freedom plus uniform and all day spent within a two-cycle mix on a bright red Bantam while getting paid for the pleasure; well that’s how I saw it.

It never happened to me but a mate’s brother joined their ranks and overnight became the most revered chap in our street. The telegram boy had become a requirement of the messaging system since dot-dot-dash first came down the wires, apart from during the First World War when the lack of home-based males meant ‘girls’ were given the unenviable task of delivering bad news.

Initially, pedal power was the propulsion most suitable in towns and became their primary working environment. The sight of a postal uniform on your doorstep was never going to be appreciated during wartime and that anxiety continued into the Sixties. For Mr or Mrs Average, a Post Office BSA at your gate represented either eight score draws or most likely another reason to dig out that black tie.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY GRANT FORD

Everyone should have one of these, it’s a ‘get out of road tax free’ disc.

Above: Waiting for the next job at the depot allowed time for a chat, but there was no messing around when the telegram boy was on duty, he was expected to take off at a moment's notice

WORKING BIKES – GPO

The Post Office began to utilise the motorcycle's potential around the start of the First World War.

Fitted with bespoke sidecars, marques such as New Hudson and Douglas were converted for either delivery use or telecoms maintenance; the latter was still in its infancy.

Postwar and the abundance of army surplus machines encouraged the GPO to purchase huge numbers of vehicles, including over 2500 Triumphs alone. Although these ex-military vehicles were no doubt good value, they had endured a hard life but still gave a few years use before being replaced by new machines.





Around the mid-1920s BSA became the marque of choice and numbers of its more powerful (6hp) variants came complete with weighty side cars for carrying larger mail items and tools. Things changed again as the 1930s arrived and the Post Office considered that due to the ever increasing amount of mail being posted, the motorcycle combination was not always suited to the task, especially in rural districts. Two- and three-wheelers had proved their value in urban areas, so rather than replace the combinations, many were converted to solos just in time for the expansion of the Telegram service. Research confirmed by Paul Woods' excellent article on the GPO's enthusiasm for two wheels explains that in 1933 a dozen BSA 250s found a home in Leeds – to be worked by 17- and 18-year-old 'young postman' under the new Motorcycle Telegraph Service which quickly spread to other major towns and proved extremely popular in London.

In the early days, the environment facing your average telegram boy was almost military; strict rules on behaviour and appearance with daily inspections of kit and machine. The Second World War forced a massive increase in both postal and telegram use. While the reliable 250 BSAs were purchased in their hundreds, larger machines continued with sidecars. When peace returned the GPO flirted with powered cycles from other manufacturers (mostly Villiers two-strokes attached to a push bike frame), though the BSA continued to dominate.





1



2



3



4



5

THE BANTAM IS BORN

War reparations meant the Allies helped themselves to some of Germany's best designs and BSA appreciated the DKW R125, reverse engineered it and produced a legend – the Bantam.

First and foremost, the Bantam was desirable enough to boost the company's postwar export drive around the globe, offering third world durability with minimal maintenance. It could survive the harsh terrain of the outback and took the mechanically unsympathetic learner in its stride – but its real test came courtesy of the testosterone-filled telegram boy.

December 1948 saw the GPO initially order 50 125cc Bantams complete with hardtail and leg-shields. These machines would 'do their duty' until 1971, after some 6000 had been abused on a daily basis travelling the UK's roads in all weathers. Although it is often mentioned that the telegram service made little profit, figures from 1957 show they employed 1580 messengers, each one averaging around 25 deliveries per day, taking an average time of 15 minutes; one greeting telegram cost five shillings for 12 words, equivalent to a full tank of fuel in the Bantam.

Telecommunications was moving on apace and even the increased performance of the D5 Bantam and its 174cc power plant didn't sway the preference for newer technologies. The all nationalised Post Office arrived in 1969 and after 24 years the collaboration with BSA finally ceased. The Steyr-Puch was phased in over the next decade as the Bantams were retired, and although tests were carried out with alternates from Honda and Garelli, nearly 3000 Puch MV-50s worked UK cities and major towns until 1979.

By this time the telegram had lost its importance as the phone took control, faxes followed to strike another blow but the courier market boom during the 1980s allowed Express Post to be launched. The Post Office took on a few of Honda's CD175 and a couple of dozen GT550 from Kawasaki plus various mopeds for the London work, but the postal relationship with two wheels was over. BSA had enjoyed the best of the telegram while the telegram boy had enjoyed the best of BSA; the 125cc Bantam was and still remains 'Post Office bike of choice' for those who rode them.

1: Tax free travel – the GPO bikes were released from paying road tax... and they also enjoyed 'hinder free travel' as it's an offence to intentionally delay the mail, something the telegram boy would use to his advantage where possible

2: The Walker Roadmaster saddle offers a very authentic look to Roger's Bantam. It may not be an original but certainly looks of the period

3: Roger's machine features wheels and spokes sporting Post Office red (538) and fuel filler on the right. Both bikes benefited from telescopic forks advertised as enjoying BSA's "easy springs" for comfort on all road surfaces

4: With its petrol filler cap on the left Dennis also enjoys a round speedo on his Bantam which offers an 80mph figure... surely only actually achievable if ridden off a cliff?

5: The 1959 machine has Wipac stamped in the rear light lens, one name that will be familiar to Bantam owners with electrics by Wico Pacy or Lucas, but also note the speedo is driven from the rear wheel

GOOD OLD SOUTHERN BOYS

Roger Jasper and Dennis Legge are two such veterans of the 1960s telegram service and they rode their Bantams from the Chichester offices of HM Post Office for two years – the full term allowed for any 'young postman' to ride for reward.

Training began with a probation period aboard a bicycle delivering around the town, but as their 16th birthday arrived it usually coincided with a senior boy returning his googles and helmet. Roger joined in 1965 and Dennis a year later, making two thirds of the crew operating out of the Sussex town. Together with third rider Nigel Horton they are the last of a breed – all still riding and come complete with original uniforms, bikes and memories. This trio covered an area which included packed seaside resorts and the sparsely populated South Downs with its tiny hamlets and villages tucked

away within. Over a cold beer they told *CBG* why those two years aboard one of Birmingham Small Arms' finest offered them the greatest of moments and why that relationship continues today.

All chose different life paths afterwards and all are now retired – Dennis left the GPO and joined the ambulance service while Roger stayed on and received a 50-year service award. "100 miles per day was the norm and we always took the chance to ride together, these were rare occasions but offered a chance to perfect your slipstreaming technique," Dennis explained with a smile.

Performance wasn't brilliant anyway but with a longer slide in the Amal carb governing ultimate speeds to around 30mph, overtaking became a skill the boys quickly mastered. Roger confessed seeing the speedo flicker around 50mph coming down the steep hill near Goodwood house, freewheeling with his chin on the tank. He also divulged overtaking a cattle truck just as a cow relieved itself through the open slats of the trailer; his wet weather gear came in handy on that occasion.

If the branch took delivery of a new bike the pecking order ensured the longest serving rider enjoyed 'first dibs' but as the guys explained, having the newest machine wasn't always the ultimate prize; it was the fastest on the fleet that counted. This may explain why the bolt-on windshield with rubber apron wasn't a huge hit, it cost 5mph and consequently all inclines were endured in second; this protection from the elements was not taken up by the Chichester lads.



"Look what I got!" Yes, another seaside trip armed with money orders for 'potless' holiday makers. Dennis explained: "It often took longer to find the right caravan than the 12 mile journey down to the camps"



MAINTENANCE OF BIKE AND BOY

Roger continued: "You fuelled up every morning, well we didn't, a bloke called Morris did, just in case the petrol went missing. We then added two capfuls of two-stroke oil to the mix. The bikes had to be cleaned weekly by the rider, which included scrubbing the engine with a paraffin mix".

During the winter the muddy country lanes ensured the Bantams were constantly filthy. The kit supplied was mainly Government surplus, even in the 1960s, the gloves "designed to absorb rain" (according to Dennis) came with fluorescent arrows on the back for hand signals after dark. A warmer winter uniform was provided, including a thick leather waistcoat or shooting vest, with oil skins to repel the lashing rain.

It was compulsory for the Chichester lads to possess a crease in their trousers, a shine on their ex-Army boots and short hair. Their Bantams received a weekly check over and any issues would go through the 'in-house' workshops. Regular repairs included broken throttle cables and replacement of leg shield frames; a very common issue due to over enthusiastic cornering – looked upon with pride by the telegram boy, in the same way current riders would consider 'getting one's knee down'. Wearing out this part of your bike impressed your mates while offering a mini firework display once perfected at night; no doubt it also led to a few broken levers and foot pegs when over cooked. I hasten to add, Roger is not averse to 'removing some red' even today ensuring the leg guard repair tradition continues, at least with one Bantam.

DAYS TO REMEMBER

"The job allowed us to meet new people every day," said Roger. In 1967 police conducted a high profile raid on Keith Richards' mansion in West Wittering and arrested Mick Jagger and Richards for drug offences.

The Chichester office would often have a telegram for that address but the one for Jagger while in custody of Chichester Court sticks in Roger's mind; a chance to ask if he wanted to reply was considered a prized delivery.

"From Lord March at Goodwood to a reclusive farmer in the middle of nowhere, we delivered to all walks of life. Good news and bad, the uniformed boy aboard a Bantam enjoyed access all areas; the Queen's Mail could not be hindered," Dennis explained with a crafty grin. Often the boys would deliver 'money orders', sent by family to holiday makers who had blown their funds – a telegram was equivalent to handing over £20 notes. The same facility was also used by gamblers who had not done so well at the races – the jockeys' 'weigh in' rooms at Goodwood and Fontwell Park became regular runs being only a few miles from the office. Team owners, mechanics and racing drivers would also receive urgent communications, although by the time Roger and Dennis were delivering, the circuit that once hosted the likes of Moss and Hawthorn was just about to close. While they delivered their fair share of bad news, by the mid-1960s telegrams were used for a variety of reasons, with good luck messages to first night theatre actors or wedding couples. Urgent messages to the guard houses of the Army barracks in Chichester or the historic RAF Tangmere would have been entrusted to the lads, even though most of its operational aircraft had found new bases by then.

Saturday was always busy; Roger remembers

Above: Having the fastest bike was far more important than riding the newest one, obviously!

1: The 'Plunger' units took the worst of the bumps away. The system, while limited in travel, was utilised by several manufacturers and could be maintained with a grease gun every 1000 miles

2: Delivering after dark in the wilderness called for the Post Office torch to light up house numbers, especially designed to attach to the rider's GPO badge

3: Right-hand gear change favoured by riders of a certain vintage and GPO bikes also enjoyed a battery (yes, direct electrics was an option). Most drip a little... but that tends to happen as your 60th birthday approaches











Right: After working Christmas week Roger pocketed £5-18s... but later a magistrate took £5 in penalties after he was stopped for speeding. He acquired a stamp in his licence as a memento

having to work World Cup Final day in 1966: "No one else did but we had too," he added in disgust, and they were always on duty for Christmas and Boxing days. Not much time left for socialising then I asked, before also asking if the telegram boy of the 1960s enjoyed the attention of the ladies. The consensus of opinion was riding a Bantam didn't aid your chances with the fairer sex at all, as Dennis pointed out: "It was the time of Mods and Rockers... we belonged to neither and were disliked by both."

CURRENT CARRIERS, DIFFERENT MESSAGE

Dennis acquired his current 1963 model from a collector and ex-GPO messenger in Cumbria, while Roger struck lucky with a box of parts that became a completed 1959 machine under his care; all courtesy of an eBay advert.

They are both 'plunger' models, which was the mainstay of GPO machines; the first factory arrivals in 1950 continued until 1963 although the Post Office still took delivery of new ones right through to 1968.

The 'plunger' rear suspension was considered a compromise between the earlier hardtail and the conventional swing arm model. Both offer three speeds and 4bhp from a unit-construction motor featuring cast barrel and alloy head.

These machines may well have been four years apart but with Post Office requirements unchanged I must admit anticipating a mirror image. "Every one is different," both men agreed, "both in riding and often appearance"... and they were right. Not big noticeable alterations, just small production changes. For example Dennis enjoys chrome wheels while the earlier machines are painted. Roger's speedo is a 'D' shape but the later machine is circular and each enjoys fuel filler caps – but located on opposite sides of the tank. No doubt these anomalies could have been batch changes; remember the GPO didn't purchase by the dozen, it was normally by the hundred and often several of those each time.

One thing that hasn't altered is their pilots' joy once on the move, their enthusiasm with the throttle grip and reluctance to ease down through the twisties; it was all or nothing five decades ago, so it's no surprise they ride with vigour now.

STILL GOT IT

These riders certainly have tales to tell and just stopping to capture the images on route meant allowing time for folk of a certain generation to ask questions and set their mobiles to camera.

I first met the 'messengers' at Goodwood's Revival several years ago and they can often be found recounting their lives aboard the Bantam at events across the country. Their machines look correctly weathered, not perfect and gleaming but authentic, while the uniforms draw interest like a magnet.



Above: Roger Jasper (left) and Dennis Legg (right) tore up the streets of Sussex half a century ago when they learnt the arts of 'slipstreaming' and 'leg-shield grinding'

Below: By 1967 the Gloster Meteor was being phased out along with the RAF base it now calls home. The BSA Bantam had a few more years with the Post Office, but just like the fighter jet a replacement was on the horizon.

But what is it like living with a 50-year-old 125cc in modern times?

"The main priority is Bantam-friendly roads – we seek them out," said Dennis. Parts are not a problem (both are owners' club members) but regular maintenance is a must, spanner checks are compulsory as this BSA will vibrate bolts loose with ease. The surviving machines will have endured a lifetime of use within their first few years and are just a fraction of those supplied to depots. Therefore, in our age of texts and email, the GPO Bantam remains for the future generations to wonder how life was.

For years these bikes and riders were the final stage of the fastest messaging service available. The Bantam was perfect for its task, especially during the 1950s and 60s – strong enough to cope with the abuse, missed gears or being launched minus rider through any High Street in the land. The riders were ideally suited to the task, young and fearless, your average telegram boy got to live life in the fastest of lanes for a 16-year-old. They may have restricted the machines but they could never restrict their teenage pilots. CBG




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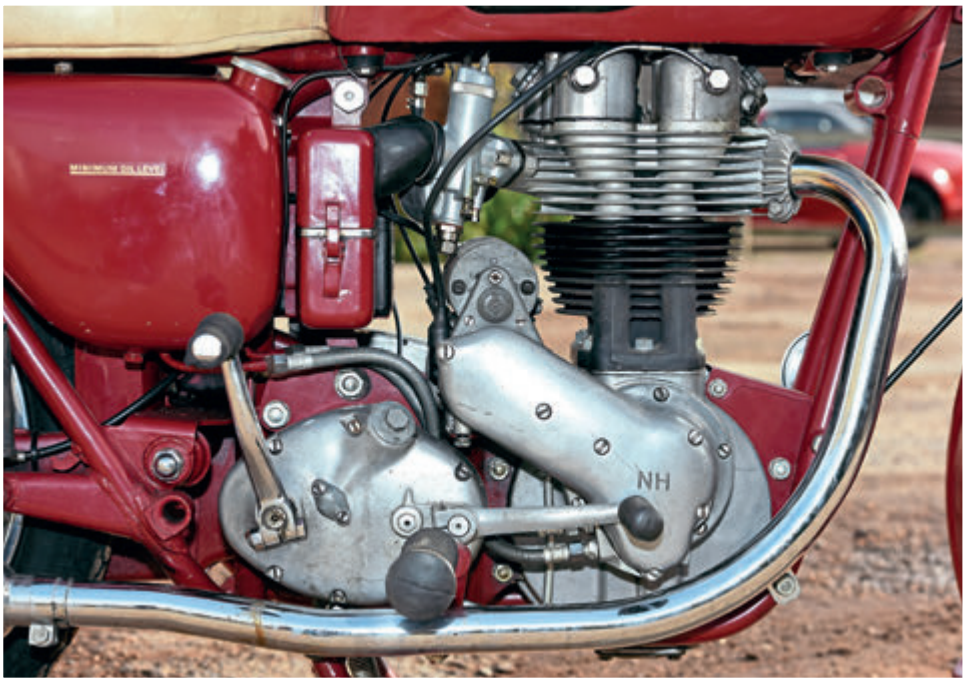


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Thanks to Roger and Iain Gwynn at Draganfly, Paul Jameson at the Ariel Owners Motorcycle Club, Dave Bury and Andy Tiernan for their help with this article









Ariel NH350

The Ariel NH350 Red Hunter was all things to all riders for more than 30 years. And it still can be today

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HULL AND ROGER GWYNN

IN PRODUCTION FOR more than 30 years, the Ariel OHV single engine went from being ground-breaking new technology to a marketing bombshell, powering high-performance sports bikes and serving as a reliable commuter steed for everyman.

The story began in 1925 when Ariel employed a new designer fresh from JAP, Val Page. Page's work revolutionised the Ariel model range from 1926. His first job for Ariel was to design a modern engine, and his efforts produced the single-cylinder mill that became the backbone of Ariel production for the next three decades, until Ariel ceased trading in four strokes in 1959.

While the Ariel engine owed its origins to Val Page, in 1932 the legendary designer Edward Turner revamped the single, producing a bike with a chrome-plated tank and red panels to produce a bike that was as fashionable as it was reliable. The Birmingham-based company's two singles, a 500 and a 350, were often referred to, though not exclusively, as the Red Hunter, and were considered among the best British singles. Paul Jameson, from the Ariel Owners Club, says: "The Red Hunters were introduced in 1932 and were the top of the range. While there are lots of varieties that aren't, by the end of production all the OHV singles were Red Hunters."

Motorcycle writer Bob Currie called the

This lovely 1956 example is for sale by Andy Tiernan at £4650. Thanks to Andy, Jo and Pete for the kind loan. For more information, see andybuysbikes.com

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post-1956 Red Hunter 'the most handsome British single of all'. As a trials mount the Ariel single had few equals, with Sammy Miller winning more than 600 trophies on an Ariel-powered machine.

Ariel's manufacturing operation was meticulous and all Red Hunters were bench tested for two hours and tuned before being put into machines. The ports were polished, the forged steel flywheels and the crankshaft were balanced, all of which helped maintain the Ariel's reputation for sporty reliability. This continued into the 1950s as it competed on and off-road against the BSA Gold Star and Norton Inter. Even today this tough engine can be seen competing at National Sprint Association meets. These were bikes that punched well above their weight and kept winning trophies and plaudits long after they should have been dead and buried.

Val Page's single was a solid design using a taper-fit crankpin with crowded rollers.



ARIEL NH 350 RED HUNTER 1955

ENGINE: OHV single, 346cc **POWER:** 19bhp @ 5800rpm **TOP SPEED:** 73mph **COMPRESSION:** 6.2:1 **BORE AND STROKE:** 72mm x 85mm **CARB:** Amal monobloc **IGNITION:** Lucas magneto, manual advance/retard **ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:** 6v Lucas dynamo **GEARBOX:** Four-speed **FINAL DRIVE:** Fully enclosed chain **CLUTCH:** Dry, multi-plate **FRAME:** Double cradle **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Telescopic fork **REAR SUSPENSION:** Swingarm, twin shock absorbers **FRONT TYRE:** 3.00-19 **REAR TYRE:** 3.25-19 **FRONT BRAKES:** 7in (178mm) SLS drum **REAR BRAKES:** 7in (178mm) SLS drum **WEIGHT:** 379lbs (172kg) **OVERALL LENGTH:** 85.8in (2180mm) **FUEL CAPACITY:** 4.5 gallons (20 litres)

The primary drive used a single-row chain, with a spring-type shock absorber built into the crankshaft sprocket. A dry clutch under a pressed steel casing passed power to a four-speed Burman gearbox. Electricity and ignition were supplied by a Lucas Magdyno, a combined magneto and generator unit. The gearbox was a three-speed Burman Q in 1932, some of the others used a T 1933-35. The engine was redesigned for 1951 with a single lobe camshaft with cam followers that had wide 'feet' to minimise wear, an arrangement described by The Motor Cycle as "robust". There had been a few other changes, principally the introduction of enclosed rocker boxes in 1938.

By the 50s Red Hunter buyers had been given a sprung frame, first with plunger suspension and a quickly detachable rear wheel as an option. A new duplex frame with swingarm rear suspension appeared in 1954 and in 1956 the 350cc engine got an aluminium cylinder head like that of its 500cc big brother, as well as cast-in pushrod tunnels.

The heavy steel construction and items that ensured the model's reliability, such as the factory fitted air filter box, large oil tank, headlamp nacelle and enclosed rear chain took the weight out to 175kg. That big chaincase (1956-58) is built from four pieces of pressed steel and included a 'wick

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DAVE BURY BOUGHT HIS NH350 SECOND HAND IN 1962 FOR £50

"I've only ever bought one other bike," Dave says. The Red Hunter served him well, taking him to and from Bristol to work in Paulton, near Radstock, every working day in all weathers from 1962 to 1976 when the ignition system finally stopped producing a strong enough spark. Oil had entered the magneto from the drive side and bunged up the works, so the bike was parked up and a slightly warmer Ford Popular was acquired to do the commute.

Dave couldn't bring himself to get rid of the Ariel and it sat in the back of the shed until 2007 when he was inspired by his daughter and son-in-law to get back on two wheels. He visited the Bristol Classic Motorcycle Show at Shepton Mallet and met members of the Wells Classic Motorcycle Club who encouraged him to get the Ariel back on the road.

The bottom end of the engine is exactly as it was in 1976 and, indeed, as it was in 1962. The top end was given some new piston rings, the magneto rewound, Dave hand-painted the tin work in its original Glamour Red paint scheme and he changed the carb, simply because it was cheaper and easier than rebuilding the old one.

The only issue he found when he refettled the Ariel was a problem with the charging system when he spotted that the needles on the ammeter seemed to go the wrong way when the bike ran. As it had never given him trouble before he didn't realise the electrical system was positive earth and it took neighbouring biker and electrical engineer Geoff Mackin to spot that and swap the battery terminals.

"I painted the wheels and spokes and bought a new seat. Oh yes, and a new horn after the old one gave up." The Ariel, with 34,000 miles on the clock, is still running the chain it had when he bought it. "It's as good as anything, and like sitting on an armchair. It gets a bit rattly at 50mph but that goes away at 60. I do the timing by sticking a pencil down the plug hole to find TDC and taking it back to ⅜inch before TDC. The gearbox leaks a bit, but I just put a tray underneath to collect the oil, filter it and put it back in."

Even driving the bike into concrete bollards in the 1970s failed to stop it. Dave bent back the footpegs and carried on. "It's a great workhorse," he says. "It has never broken down, never left me stranded."

lubrication' system, using oil that sprayed onto the wick in the top of the oil tank as it returned to the tank. From here, a pipe took the few drops of oil necessary down to the chaincase.

This arrangement replaced the system used up to 1955 in which a metered screw at the rear end of the primary chaincase allowed oil from the primary chaincase to reach the rear chain and so prolong drive chain life.

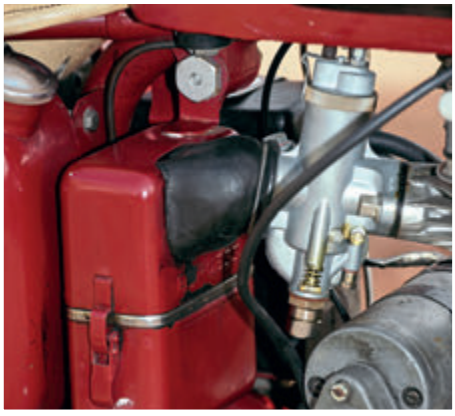
Although only available as an option in 1956, the majority of the 350s left the factory with the fully enclosed chaincase.

By the mid-50s most Ariel single buyers were looking for robust, reliable and practical machines to get to work on in all weathers. The duplex frame handled well and the alloy hub brakes were good when fitted with their original green linings. Replacement linings did not work well but modern linings can work all too well. With some types of modern linings fitted the front brake can be a grabby affair – the earlier half-width cast iron brakes were as good as any.

An Ariel Owners Club member has manufactured a modified front brake plate







WHAT IS A RED HUNTER?

There is a tendency to refer to all OHV Ariel singles from 1932 to 1959 as Red Hunters, but the reality is that it's a lot more complicated than that, according to Draganfly: "From 1926 onwards every model produced was given a model code, which appeared to be the only reference used within the factory – and in some cases these were only used in the factory.

"Names only seem to have been used in publicity, never in the parts books, where the model code is always used and they were not too specific about the names, Red Hunter Single being used one year and Hunter Single the next. The accurate way to describe a particular model is to use its designated model code, rather than refer to the model name. To call an Ariel a Red Hunter is misleading as this could refer to a 250, 350 or 500 single as well as to a 500 twin, not to mention any of the competition models. There is a tendency to call any single a Red Hunter when many are in fact Standard or De Luxe models and in fact only seven of the 50 four-stroke models made between 1926 and 1958 were called Red Hunters and that includes the KH." The NH 350 single is one of those bikes that does bear the Red Hunter name and did so from 1933-1958.





that converts the single leading shoe to a twin leading shoe operation. Some riders fit BSA wheels with 8in brakes in place of the original Ariel item. The owners' club also supplies a range of parts that would be uneconomical for commercial suppliers to make.

In 1957 the 350, like all Ariels of the time, apart from the Square Four and competition models, was given a big 4½ gallon petrol tank with two sides pressed out and welded together, the weld covered by a smart chromed strip and the tank was fixed by a central bolt following the pattern established by the BSA parent company. This has caused occasional problems and is one of the few real faults an owner might come across with a late Red Hunter.

Paul Jameson says the design could lead to leaks forming behind the rubber knee grips and around the central bolt fixing. He says: "Until then all Ariel tanks were held on by four bolts under the tank, but after 1957 they had the single bolt and rested on four rubbers. Most of the time they are fine but they may split along the welds."

Deeply valanced mudguards were used on the late models and this was partly, according to The Motor Cycle 1956 show report, so that front registration numbers could be painted on the sides. An internal brace replaced the front mudguard stays, which were felt to be a trap for muck and rust. Sadly, this didn't work as the mudguards have a habit of splitting.

The end of production came for the Red Hunter in 1959 when Ariel decided to update its range. As the decade came to an end the BSA parent company had decided that there was no room for old style four-stroke singles in the marketplace and to the outrage of their traditionalist owners the revolutionary Leader and Arrow twins replaced the old stager on the production lines.

What are they like to live with?

Riders will find a 350 Red Hunter just capable of keeping up with modern traffic but it will be at the upper end of its performance. Paul Jameson ran a 350 until 2010 when he upgraded to a 500.

"I found it was a bit slow in modern traffic in hilly areas but they do go well enough – just don't try pulling a sidecar with one. They are extremely comfy and handle very well indeed. Acceleration and top speed are adequate and the fully enclosed chain and gearbox are absolutely sound, the gearbox being virtually the same across the Ariel range from the 350 to the Square Four. The traditional Lucas Magdyno works perfectly well and if there are faults, just get it rewound by an expert like Tony Cooper.

"The dry clutch is relatively unusual but standard on all Ariels. Oil will leak out of the primary drive if you fill it above the level hole, but otherwise it will provide adequate lubrication for the chain. The clutch has two friction plates and when properly set up you can operate it with one finger.

"I would say that by the time you got to 1957 the Red Hunter had been given a very heavy frame and cycle parts that affected the 350 as it was the smallest bike in the range. There is an argument that the lighter cycle parts on the prewar models made for a much more nimble ride. From the end of the Second World War the 350 single was the biggest seller in the range and as four-stroke production came to an end it was the 500 twin that went first, then the singles. At the end production was bit volatile, with cancelled orders and machines just didn't get despatched to dealers.

"Ariel exported bikes all over the world and the singles are popular in Scandinavia, Australia and New Zealand there are some in South Africa and even a few in Zimbabwe. We have an enthusiastic branch in Germany and there are even some pre-war examples in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania." CBG

ARIEL EXPERT ROGER GWYNN FROM DRAGANFLY MOTORCYCLES:

Parts availability is very good, especially for the models from the 1950s, but also for the very early models, because Ariel was big enough to make good bikes but not so big that it could afford to be constantly changing them, in other words many parts from the 1950s fit all the way back to 1933. Difficult parts are 500 heads, barrels and cranks, good petrol tanks, primary chaincases, air filters.

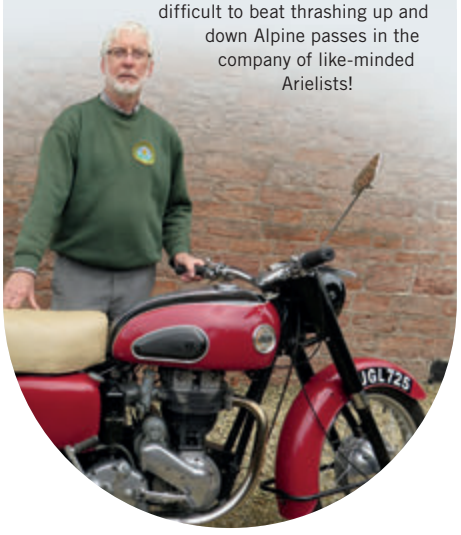
If you are looking at buying a NH350 the process is no different to any other machine but one of the best things is that they have few weaknesses. There are very few differences between models in the 1950s, the changes tend to be by year rather than model. Of course, carbs vary and the 350s have smaller petrol and oil tanks, a two-plate clutch and a CP instead of a BA gearbox.

The best bits about an Ariel single is that they are easy to work on, there's ready spares availability, a good owners' club, interchangeability of parts across the models and years, although this can be a bad thing, as there are pitfalls with slight variations of lengths of gearbox mainshafts etc. The worst bits are that the later models are overweight and more awkward to work on.

The rigid and swinging arm frames handle very well, the undamped plungers can be interesting at speed on bumpy corners but rarely cause a big problem. The 350 can even keep up with modern traffic, but just stay off dual carriageways.

Most people want a 500 but the 350, with its lighter piston, will rev better and can cruise at the same speed as the 500 – it is mainly at a disadvantage when carrying a passenger, although I have toured two up with camping gear on a swingarm 350.

The Ariel single owning experience is very good – I have had most of my best motorcycling on them over the last 40 years. It is difficult to beat thrashing up and down Alpine passes in the company of like-minded Arielists!



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Staff Tip!



Colin says:

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Ducati SportClassic 1000S

Born before its time, the SportClassic 1000S is now most sought after, offering a ready to go cafe racer with Italian charm

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT HULL

ITALIAN MOTORCYCLE COMPANIES are often ahead of the game when it comes to style and design, but sometimes it can work to their disadvantage. This was a lesson learned by Ducati when it was a decade before its time in anticipating the craze for factory café racers.

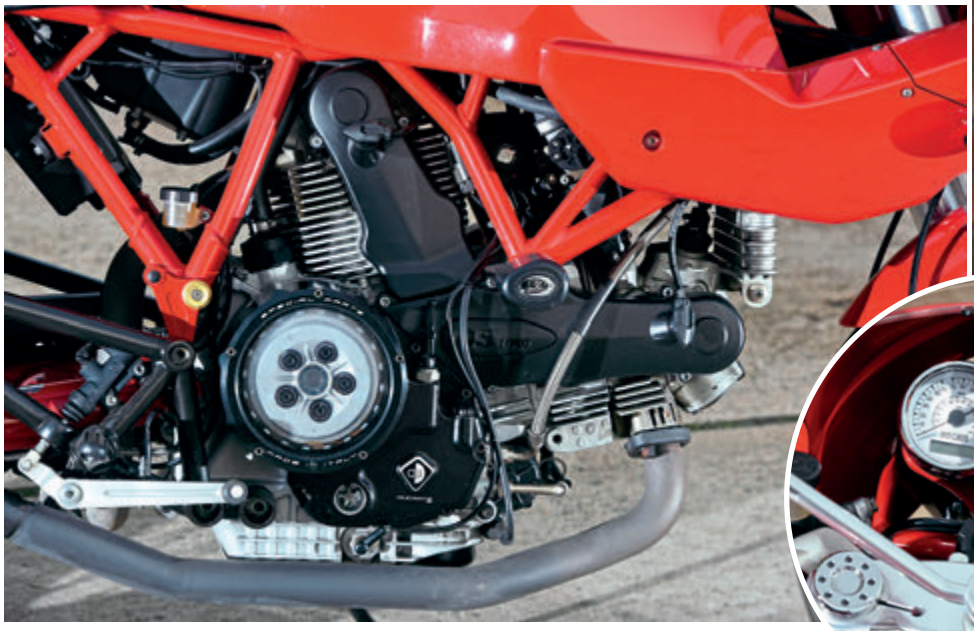
Ducati has an interesting history when it comes to design innovation. This is the company that managed to produce the 851 at the same time as the Indiana custom, and the much-admired bevel 900ss at the same time as the derided 500 parallel twin.

Ducati debuted the limited-edition Mike Hailwood Replica MH900e in 1999, of which only 2000 were made – the first thousand available exclusively online at 00.01am, January 2000. The bike was a hit and the following year it came up with a whole new range of cafe racer-styled machines under the 'SportClassic' banner. The reaction of people at motorcycle shows was positive enough for Ducati to put the bikes into production, but in the showrooms the new range was harder to shift.

Pierre Terblanche, who had the impossible task of designing a replacement for the gorgeous 916/996 with the 999 was the stylist, and the first bikes of the SportClassic range were the limited edition 2005 Paul Smart Replica and the standard Sport 1000. The Replica was styled after Smart's 1972 Imola winning 750, and it came with a silver half-fairing and green frame, as well as Öhlins suspension, with a single shock absorber on the left-hand side and a pair of exhausts on the right in a limited run of 2000 units.

The Sport 1000 was an unfaired bike that took its styling cues from the classic 1973 750 Sport with a bright yellow paint job. It had non-adjustable Marzocchi forks and a lower-spec Sachs shock absorber. Like all the SportClassics, it sported some period touches such as the round old-style rear light. The Sport 1000 was launched alongside the Smart Replica and cost £2000 less. All models were nearly identical underneath the bodywork and shared the 992cc, SOHC, two-valve-per-cylinder, 84bhp 90° V-twin, or as Ducati insists, an L-twin, that was full of character and packed with torque.

In 2007 Ducati introduced the Sport 1000S, which used some Sport components like the Marzocchi forks but included a version of the nose fairing used on the Paul Smart Replica. It had black anodised alloy wheel rims and some nice touches like the round old style rear light. The 1000S and the Sport 1000 both gained a dual-shock swingarm and wet clutch, a decision probably forced upon Ducati by







the Euro 3 noise testing. Lower handlebars were required to fit under the fairing on the 1000S and a Conti-style silencer was fitted each side. The Sport got a red paint job and later a glossy black and silver look. The Sport 1000S came in red with the option of a full fairing in green and red.

The GT1000 was also launched, styled to resemble the 1971 GT750. The GT also had the conventional twin rear shock absorber set-up using a pair of Sachs shocks, a dual seat, an exhaust on each side, more steering lock and higher handlebars. There was even a touring version with a screen and a small luggage rack.

A limited run of 100 models of the Sport was commissioned for the USA market, painted black and gold like the famous 1979 900ss. Ultimately, these became one of the more desirable models. The range survived in the showrooms until 2010, shedding an edition each year, with the GT1000 being the last listed model.

Many Ducati SportClassic owners agree that the big twin isn't terribly comfortable, especially on the first models. Terblanche might have come up with a stunning design, but it seems that he hadn't considered that people might want to ride it anywhere but for short blasts down a smooth stretch of autostrada. Some find the riding position is cramped and the seat on all but the GT is hard, so although this is a big and powerful machine, long-distance rides can be a chore. One of the biggest issues was the distance from the saddle to the bars was too long, so the rider's arms face quite a stretch. This makes the bikes hard work, particularly in town. Some riders fit flat bars to their unfaired Sport models, with Rizoma short risers available from Moore Speed Racing in Poole, drilling through the top yoke to mount them. The best place for any SportClassic is on a smooth, winding bit of asphalt, where the big engine's torque can perform at its best.

At the time of its launch the big-bore motorcycle market was all about power and technology, not misty-eyed nostalgia. Young riders wanted the latest insanely fast Japanese rocketship, or if they wanted some European style, they might choose one of Ducati's own sports offerings. The few retro-looking bikes available were mostly in the big bruiser camp, with the likes of Yamaha's XJR1300, the Kawasaki ZRX and Honda CB1300 taking the honours. Ducati's Italian rival Moto Guzzi was turning out a more practical and almost as sporty big twin, the Griso. The Triumph Thruxton in 900 guise was launched at the same time, but while the SportClassic had a relatively short shelf life, the Thruxton survived and grew, perhaps because it was easier to live with.

Older riders who tried them out loved the style and found a SportClassic would turn admiring heads wherever it went. But at the time those older riders found the stiff-backed, sore-wristed and crick-necked riding position a serious problem. Ducati modified the riding position on later Sport 1000 models to make life easier for their riders, but by this point the damage to the SportClassic's reputation had been done. Yet if Ducati had launched the SportClassic five years ago instead of 15, you wouldn't be able to move for them in the bike park as they jostled for position with BMW R nineTs and 1200cc Triumph Thruxtons.

ENGINE: L-twin cylinder, two valves per cylinder Desmodromic, air-cooled 992cc **BORE X STROKE:** 94 x 71.5mm **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 10.1:1 **POWER:** 83bhp (61kw) @ 8000rpm **TORQUE:** 61lb-ft @ 6000rpm **FUEL INJECTION:** Marelli electronic fuel injection, 45mm throttle body **EXHAUST:** Black exhaust system with two mufflers **GEARBOX:** Six-speed **PRIMARY DRIVE:** Straight cut gears **FINAL DRIVE:** Chain **CLUTCH:** Wet multi-plate with hydraulic control **FRAME:** Tubular steel trellis frame **FRONT SUSPENSION:** 43mm upside-down fork **FRONT WHEEL:** Spoked wheel with black aluminium rim, 3.50 x 17 **FRONT TYRE:** 120/70 R17 **REAR SUSPENSION:** Twin fully adjustable shock absorber **REAR WHEEL:** Spoked wheel with black aluminium rim 5.50 x 17 **REAR TYRE:** 180/55 R17 **FRONT BRAKE:** 2 x 320mm semi-floating discs, floating caliper two-piston, two-sintered pads **REAR BRAKE:** 245mm disc, one-piston floating caliper, two-sintered pads **INSTRUMENTATION:** Electronic panel: speedometer, rev counter, warning light for low oil pressure, indicators for high beam, fuel reserve, turn signals, LCD clock, immobilizer

Many thanks to Vince at seastarsuperbikes.co.uk for letting us photograph this stunning example. It may still be for sale, priced at £15,495. Give them a ring on 01508 471919

John Cellier, aka Ducati John of Rothwell near Leeds, says: "The SportClassics were a bit of a strange bike when they came out. The dealers couldn't sell them, especially the GT1000, but now people are going for a bit of nostalgia, they've become a bit of an asset buy.

"The engine is a peach, a lovely lazy torquey thing. The rider sits high on the seat and it can be quite hard on the wrists – a bit like the 916. So we've softened the suspension on them for people to make them easier to ride on British roads.

"Because they're so light there's not a lot of stress on the cycle parts. Reliability is good and we've only had one in, which had a problem with the ECU. The plastic tank tends to expand because of the ethanol in the petrol, but unlike bikes like the Multistrada and the Streetfighter, in which the tanks can swell so much you can't get it off, this isn't so much of an issue. The paint is good on most of the bike, although it can flake off the engine casings."



RICH LLEWELLIN

Rich Llewellin, from Ducati specialists Louigi Moto in Somerset, has been racing, repairing and fettling Ducati Twins and singles since the mid-1990s. Of the SportClassic range, Rich says: "As the years have rattled on these particular models of the Ducati range have become iconic in their own right and they are a fashionable ride with the cafe racer scene."

"The model is easy to customise by using parts from other Ducati models that were mainly just a bolt-on upgrade. The forks were particularly poor and had a lot of static sag – these could be swapped out for the ST2/4 range or just be modified with springs and pre-load spacers, the front brakes were a two-piston floating caliper, which is also poor, but we fit a sintered brake pad from a motocross bike that helps. The floaters could be swapped for the 65mm spaced Goldline caliper quite easily.

The exhaust system was restrictive and the performance catalogue made you want to spend lots on customising the beast as soon as it left the showroom. Bad points were the tractor-style saddle, which, although quite comfortable while riding, it was when you had to put your feet down and get off the machine that you realised John Wayne walked as he did."

Aftermarket parts are fairly plentiful with lots of companies making exhaust systems, 900 Bevel-style seats, full fairings and then the wheels can be swapped out for any of the Monster range. Öhlins forks and rear shocks can be added to the mix to make the bike your own.

"Things to look out for in ownership with a well-used bike are corrosion, fastenings and the finish wasn't that great. Using a SportClassic in an English winter will do the bike life-changing damage.

"They are fairly easy to service as most models don't have a fairing, dry clutch models suffer engine noise due to the nature of the clutch, regular oil changes keep the motor lasting but constant high revs will cause valves to recede and create more maintenance.

"A fuel tank service is very important as the ethanol doesn't like the plastic tank and it can expand. Idle can be a little lumpy if the throttle bodies aren't set up correctly. We take them off and clean and bench set-up. The airbox can be restrictive and it's not uncommon to do away with this part and fit aftermarket air filters. Incorporate this with custom fuel mapping and a good power gain can be had."





MY SPORTCLASSIC

Sport 1000S owner Stephen Hanna gives his take on Ducati's sport retro

"What's it like to own? Special – everywhere you park someone is either asking all about the bike or looking to buy it. I bought mine to try slowing down from my Ducati 1098S and I found I can ride this smoother and better but at sane speeds (60-120mph-ish).

"Problems are the low bars and the long reach over the tank, which is most uncomfortable.

"My bike is highly modified but every part is stored to return to factory standard. If buying modified, make sure all original parts are included, as originality is sought after. There are plenty of parts out there to modify but they can be costly. First up I would say sort your suspension, fit lighter wheels and then the sky is the limit. Mine has the Wasp power-up kit (replacing the airbox with velocity stacks, Power Commander K&N filters etc), Kineo wheels (stainless steel spokes and tubeless tyres) Sato rearsets, Öhlins steering damper, Öhlins shocks, Showa fully adjustable forks (re-valved by K-Tech), wet clutch replaced with Ducati Performance dry slipper clutch, engine casings replaced with NCR magnesium, lots of titanium, some carbon, bar end mirrors, lithium battery, new chain and sprockets, full exhaust system, remapped to suit on dyno for smooth power delivery, four-pot Brembos and a Palatov tail tidy. I'm riding this bike better than the 1098s, not fighting excess power, just smooth and fast road riding.

"This is the only bike I've had to wear earplugs for, mostly due to the induction growl and I've had to use the exhaust DB killers in an attempt to be sensible.

"The bike will wheelie on the throttle and over crests and rewards smooth knee-down cornering. I'm running Pirelli Rosso Corsa tyres, usually right to the edge.

"If you buy one make sure that you junk the original Phantom tyres, look for a low mileage bike and remember they are rare. I've been offered £14,000 for mine and turned it down."

The Ducati SportClassics are high quality motorcycles that are also, under the surface, basic and relatively unsophisticated – if any Ducati can be deemed as such.

Due to the current popularity of the cafe racer image, used values have rocketed in recent years. Like their bevel forebears, the SportClassics are motorcycles that more than hold their value. Where once you could pick up a GT1000 for £4000, prices of this, the least popular of the twins, are now hitting £10,000, around £2500 more than they were new, and are rapidly moving upwards.

A good Sport 1000S will lighten your bank account to the tune of £15,000 or more – almost twice its original selling price. Unmolested or very lightly modified bikes are the ones to go for.

John Cellier says that people buy them these days as investments as much as to ride, and they are often bought by existing Ducati owners as second bikes.

"It's the kind of motorcycle you can buy and not lose a lot on. Lots of people are scared of buying a Ducati because of their reputation – I'd say get one and try it out to see if you like it."

Ducati was ahead of its time with the SportClassic and when it went out of production in 2010 it was the Monster range that flew the Bologna factory's naked bike flag.

Now Ducati has returned to café racer territory with the latest version of the Scrambler perhaps this time, it has got the timing right. Whether the Scrambler Cafe Racer's arrival will have an impact on the rising value of a SportClassic remains to be seen. CBG



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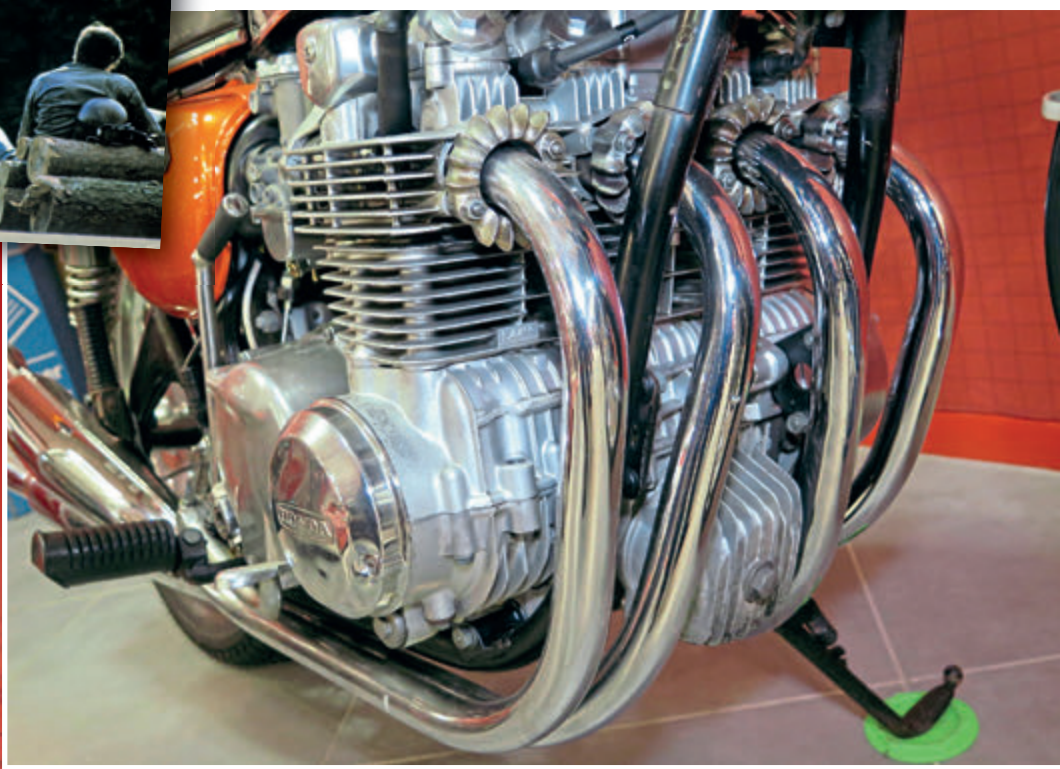
Honda CB550 Four

Often living in the shadow of its bigger brother, Honda's CB550/4 has its own charm, is just as good-looking with less bulk and is just as sweet an engine.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVER HULME













CB550 MODEL HISTORY

CB550K0 (1974): Launched in the USA and not officially imported to the UK or Europe, it replaces the 500/4

CB550F0 (1975): Another US/Canada only model

CB550F1 (1976): The first official 550 available in the UK replaces the 500/4

CB550K3 (1977): A four-pipe traditional tourer arrives in the UK to fill the gap left by the 500/4

CB550F2 (1977): The last F model, with a two-colour tank and no fork gaiters

CB550K4 (1978): The last redesign gives the K model a stepped seat. The CB550/4 is dropped in 1979 and replaced by the CB650, with the CX500 becoming Honda's offering in the middleweight category

HISTORY LESSON

In the mid-1970s Japanese manufacturers seemed to find the market for a sporting middleweight motorcycle a little confused. It was as if the manufacturers were not quite sure where their customers wanted them to go next. There were plenty of flash 350 and 400 bikes from the big four, but these were mostly two-strokes, with the notable exception of Honda's fours. Going up a capacity, Yamaha was selling the overly complex TX/XS500 twin, Kawasaki and Suzuki their 500cc two-stroke twins and triples and Honda its lardy CB500 twin, which was descended from the venerable CB450 Black Bomber.

Honda was also producing a middleweight four-stroke, four-cylinder sports tourer and, in the process, it created a whole genre. It had launched its CB500/4 in 1971 to complement the class-leading CB750/4. The CB500/4 was a good 60lbs (27kg) heavier than the last British 500 in production, the Triumph Daytona, but it was a whole 10bhp more powerful. The CB500/4 was around 80lbs (36kg) lighter than the CB750/4 and the wet-sump 500cc engine was a significantly shorter lump with an over-square design that kept the cylinder height down, despite Honda deciding not to tilt the cylinder block, as on the 750.

The compact unit helped the bike to have a lower centre of gravity, as the engine was significantly lighter than that of the CB750/4, the handling of the CB500/4 and the later CB550/4 was livelier and it was a much easier bike to ride. The frame was a steel cradle with twin down-tubes and it was stiff and well-engineered for the weight and power of the bike, which contributed greatly to the bike's handling.

Within a few years, Honda was competing with Suzuki and its softly tuned two-stroke GT550 triple. Honda boosted the capacity of its four and the CB550/4 replaced the CB500/4 in 1974, producing a popular model that remained in production until 1978.

When the first CB550s were launched in the USA, as was Honda's practice at the time, the first models were over-bored engines mounted in the CB500 frame and cycle parts, with a capacity increased to 544cc. The new CB550/4 produced more power in the mid-range than the CB500/4, although tests indicated the two bikes had the same 105mph top speed and testers later found that the CB550/4 was actually 3mph slower than the smaller and lighter CB400F.

Like all the Honda inline fours of the period, it had two valves per cylinder and a single overhead camshaft, a chain-driven primary drive and a five-speed gearbox. On the CB550/4 there were also significant changes to the clutch operating mechanism, with the cable operating a lever on the right-hand side, rather than through a worm drive and pushrod on the left that ran through the gearbox that had caused problems for CB500/4 riders.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

The SOHC engine is good, solid and uncomplicated. While the first Japanese fours were derided by die-hard British bike fans for their apparent complexities, the four is a simple design and requires little in the way of special tools to maintain and work on. Although there are lots of parts, there are simply more of them, rather than the engine being over complicated.

Honda cam-chains suffered a

HONDA CB550F 1976

ENGINE: SOHC four-cylinder **BORE AND STROKE:** 58.5 x 50.6mm **CAPACITY:** 544cc **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9:1 **CARB:** 4x22mm Keihin **POWER:** 50BHP@8500rpm **IGNITION:** Points **ELECTRICAL:** 12v alternator **TRANSMISSION:** Chain primary drive, five-speed gearbox, wet multi-plate clutch, chain final drive **FRAME:** Twin downtube double cradle **SUSPENSION:** Hydraulic forks, swingarm, twin adjustable oil damped shock absorbers **WHEELBASE:** 55.3in/1405mm **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32in/805mm **BRAKES:** Front single 11in disc; rear full width drum **WHEELS/TYRES:** Front 3.25in x 19in; rear 3.75in x 18in **WEIGHT:** 423lbs/192kg (dry) **WHEELBASE:** 55.3in/1405mm

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little from ham-fisted home maintenance and an automatic adjuster was fitted to later models with mixed results. But a four that has had its service interval 1500-mile oil changes adhered to with good quality lubricant should last well. Buyers should listen out for bottom end rumbles and knocks, as well as cam-chain rattles, though clutch noise is a feature of the model. Easily chewed up crosshead head fasteners (they look like Phillips but are actually Japanese-spec JIS – Japanese Industrial Standard and you can buy screwdrivers or bits from good tool stores) will by now have often been replaced by Allen bolts, while the original 14mm head oil filter bolt, which sits exposed to water and muck thrown up by the front wheel, may have been swapped.

Honda electric systems are good and robust too, with their wiring and components about the best to come out of Japan. Honda used a frame similar to the CB750 but stiffened up with extra bracing. The front end was excellent with their own 35mm forks but let down a little by a weak set of shock absorbers at the back, but for a 1970s Japanese motorcycle the bike handled well.

The brakes were passable, with a front disc featuring Honda's semi-floating front caliper and there is a good-sized drum at the back. The front brake, perched on the front of the forks catching all the weather, needs regular attention to the caliper with copper grease and the steel pin that fits in the pivot needs a good clean and treating with lubrication spray regularly, while taking care not to get spray on the pads or disc.

In the UK Honda kept selling 500/4s until 1975 and didn't include the 550/4 in its catalogue until 1976. The range began with the CB550F Super Sport, a machine popular with British buyers. This had a single colour paint job, a bigger tank, lower bars and a four-into-one (4-1) exhaust system, mirroring the popular CB400/4.

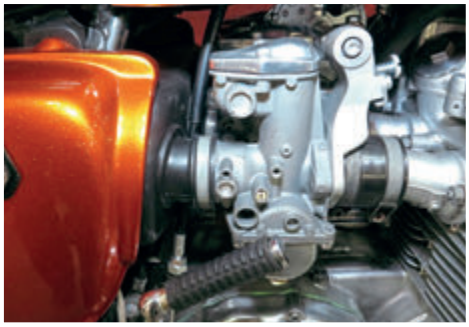
However, with a lot of early CB550 models coming into the UK today as classic imports, you might find a 550 that looks remarkably similar to the earlier 500. Charlie Garratt, from Oxford Classic Honda, explains: "If you look at a CB500K0 and a CB550K0, they look the same. The CB550K0 is not representative of the later F and K series when the frame, clocks and tanks all changed. The basic frame cradle is the same, but things like the rear footrest hangers and rear subframe are quite different. The CB550F is the sharper handling bike."

An updated K3 series launched in the UK in 1977, which lost the trumpet-style pipes for a set of four megaphone style exhausts and was fitted with a bigger tank and lower bars. Honda launched a revamped CB550F2 at the same time as the K3 with a revised paint job and detail changes.

Although the four-into-one system on the Super Sport looked more purposeful at the front, it was bulky at the back and almost as heavy as the four-into-four. It also gave less ground clearance on fast right-handers. Replacement exhausts can be eye-wateringly expensive new and hard to find second-hand in a usable condition, but if you are not bothered about originality, David Silver Spares will sell you a Motad 4-1 stainless system at a reasonable price.

The relatively low seat height, combined with the modest weight, made the F-series an attractive motorcycle for newer riders shedding their L-plates, as well as for those more experienced riders looking for a lively and fun road bike. The seat was a little firm and a common fault in the design of seats in the period was that splits in the cover would let in water that, in turn, would rot the steel seat base. A good original seat is a thing to be marvelled at. What would now be considered skinny wheels were 19in x 3.25in front and 18in x 3.75in rear and the wheelbase was comfortably long. A 550 four of any specification will happily propel a rider and passenger along at the legal limit without any noticeable vibration beyond a light buzz.

With the youngest CB550/4 now pushing 40, the chances are that aftermarket replacements will have replaced the old bouncy shock absorbers and better quality ➧





ABOUT THIS BIKE

This 1974 Honda CB550K0 is currently sitting majestically among the Fireblades, CB1100s and NC700s in the Honda department at Fowlers Motorcycles in Bristol and outshines all of them. A low mileage US import restored in the UK, this is an example of the transitional model Honda produced to introduce the 550 engine without changing the old 500s look. To do this it put the updated engine into the old style 500/4 frame and released it as the CB550K0. It is a mash-up of the older bike's frame with the more powerful, more refined engine with the clutch modification. Restored with new and reconditioned parts, it has the original clocks and seat, a fabulous metalflake paint job, original Honda silencers and new switchgear. Featuring a little patina around the clocks and engine casings, this is a bona-fide usable modern Japanese classic, and is for sale for £7994.

DAVID SILVER ON THE CB550

The CB550 four is more manageable than the CB750 and is a pretty good motorcycle all round. It's a very smooth engine with no vibes and a controlled power delivery.

We didn't get the CB550K in this country until 1977, while the Americans had it from 1974. We didn't get the kind of CB550K0 seen here, the K3 arrived in 1977, while the CB550F arrived in 1976. Things to watch out for are tanks, which rot out, and exhausts and seats also rust, which we do copies of. A replacement full exhaust for an American CB550K1 will cost £930, while a K3 exhaust is £942. If an engine is totally seized you can get your crank reground by specialist engineers and there are lots of used parts available. You need to make sure the oil is properly topped up, as the cams run directly in the cylinder head. There are mostly only cosmetic differences between the models from the 500/550 and the engines are basically the same. There was a problem with third gear on the K3, which used to knock the three dogs off the gear and Honda provided a modification kit with a four-dog gear. We tend to get more requests for parts for the American CB550 rather than the UK model. It is cycle parts rather than engine parts that are most in demand.











modern chains and brake pads have been fitted.

Of the two later 550 models, the CB550F, is probably the nicer to ride, though both models will lope along at a good, if not exhilarating, speed. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but the looks of the CB550F are what really sets it apart. At a time when everything was over-adorned and garish, the first UK model 550F was given minimal chrome, simple and plain paintwork on the tank and side panels and a four-into-one exhaust system that looks more business-like than the two pipes on either side of the CB550K.

Whether you go for an easier-to-find early US import, which is likely to have had a softer life than a UK model, or a UK spec F or K series is going to be down to personal preferences. While a K series buyer might have been a more conservative rider when the machine was new, by now a 550 with an average mileage will have been through many owners. Today, the number of stock CB550s has diminished. Until recently you could pick up a sound but tatty 550 relatively cheaply and as a result they became a popular target for special and bobber builders. You are almost more likely to see a CB550 with a short brown seat, Firestone tyres and clip-ons than one in standard trim.

Motorcycle technology moved along at an impressive pace in the 1970s and by 1978 the competition had caught up with the CB550. Suzuki's GS550 DOHC four had been revealed as a faster, better handling and much more stylish motorcycle, though it was not as durable or as useful a dual-purpose sports-tourer as the CB550. Kawasaki's Z500 four was about to be launched and Honda had introduced its own competition in the form of the CX500 V-twin, which indicated a dramatic change in the company's direction. At the same time, it was about to launch its own range of new DOHC fours in 750 and 900 formats and the old engine was looking a little dated. The CB engine was expanded and powered the CB650 and CB650 Nighthawk, the last Honda SOHC four machines, which are not exactly bad motorcycles but sold poorly in comparison with the competition from the class-leading Kawasaki Z650. Honda returned to the 550/4 with the DOHC CBX model in 1982, with considerably less success.



The Honda CB550 was, when launched, a good quality, fun and practical motorcycle. Well-built and easy to ride, the middleweight four helped cement Honda's reputation for reliability, with handling that was better than its peers and performance to match. It is remarkable to think that the wet-sump SOHC engine, a mill that helped change the world of motorcycling forever, stayed in production for less than a decade. Neither a highly stressed lightweight nor heavyweight superbike, a CB550 in good condition is still going to be an excellent choice today. CBG

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Bremen show goes to the TT

THE ISLE OF MAN TT is the focus at one of Europe's biggest classic vehicle shows in February.

The organisers of the Bremen Classic Motorshow are exhibiting a group of 20 British motorcycles never shown together before, from Friday, February 2 to Sunday, February 4, at the Bremen Fair in Germany. The special exhibition entitled 'Best of British – The TT Legends' will feature original bikes from the heyday of the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy race. From the 1914 Rudge Multi to the 1962 AJS 7R Boy Racer, these bikes give a unique and charming overview of the fast-paced developments of the time. "The race motorcycles on display even include the original winners of the TT from 1934, 1949, 1952 and 1954," says project manager Frank Ruge.

Classic motorcycles will take over the whole of one hall at the Bremen Classic Motorshow and the event will also appeal to those whose interest extends into the world of classic cars. The unrivalled speed and high-class style of the 2+2 seater of gran turismo culture – a dream car for an entire generation from the 1950s to the 1970s – is the focus of this show's special exhibition, 'Gran Turismo 2+2: Jet Set on the Road'.

The Bremen Classic Motorshow 2018 takes place from February 2-4, 2018 at Messe Bremen, Halls 1 to 8, next to Bremen's main railway station, between 9am-6pm each day. Visit classicmotorshow.de.



New MoT exemption rules firmed up

THE GOVERNMENT HAS clarified details of what will happen when the new 40-year MoT Exemption is introduced in May 2018.

Details of what the words 'substantially modified' mean, which is the term used to classify whether a vehicle can be considered exempt, have been firmed up. There has also been a change in the date at which a vehicle will be classified as 40 years old.

The 'substantially modified' category has seen the authorities abandon an original eight-point scheme which would have categorised different components, such as engines, frames, suspension and brakes as changes that affected the vehicle's historic age for a simpler arrangement. This followed concerns that vehicles that had upgraded brakes or better engines might fall foul of the regulations. Instead, 'substantially modified' will now mean a vehicle that has a power to weight ratio of more than 15 per cent in excess of its original design, unless such a modification took place before 1988.

An MoT will also still be needed if a vehicle has been issued with a registration number with a 'Q' prefix. Kit cars and reconstructed classic vehicles, a class defined by DVLA guidance will also be ineligible. Anyone applying for tax exemption will now need to declare that a vehicle hasn't been substantially changed since 1988.

Original guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) indicated that the rules would apply in the first instance to vehicles registered or manufactured before 1977 and then roll over, but this has now been changed.

A spokesman from the DfT told *Classic Bike Guide*: "The situation is that from May 20, 2018, vehicles over 40 years old will be exempt from MoT testing on a rolling basis. So on May 20, vehicles built or first registered on May 20, 1978 or earlier will become exempt; from May 21, vehicles built or first registered on May 21, 1978 or earlier will be exempt."

There will be nothing to stop owners of historic vehicles having their vehicles tested. At present, around 6% of owners whose vehicles are MoT exempt still have their vehicles tested.

Dainese goes back to the old school



MOTORCYCLE CLOTHING MANUFACTURER Dainese, more commonly known as a supplier of high-quality Italian-made performance road and racing leathers, has launched a new range of classically styled riding gear. The range, presented in its own brand of Dainese Settantadue, presents itself as a 'contemporary interpretation of iconic motorcycle clothing'.

CEO Cristiano Silei said: "Heritage, beauty and contemporaneity are the three values in which the new brand is based. In perfect harmony with our history and roots, it reinterprets technical garments to embrace an even larger audience."

The designers at Dainese Settantadue have raided their own extensive archives to create the line.

Leather jackets in the classic mould are at the heart of the first collection. Eschewing bold graphics and multiple bright colours, most of the range is in black leather with occasional colour flashes for both sexes, though some jackets are available in blue and in red. There are also black leather trousers, black gloves and a range of T-shirts and accessories.

Riding gear matches the classic look with cutting-edge armour and body protection from the company, which includes among its other products body suits for astronauts.

Visit dainesesettantadue.com to view the collection.





Kawasaki invokes the spirit of '72

KAWASAKI HAS FINALLY unveiled the long-awaited retro-themed Z900RS, based on the look of the classic Z1 of 1972.

Tagged a 'Retro Sport' thanks to its RS moniker, the new Z900RS has been painstakingly created by Kawasaki's styling department and factory engineers as an all-new machine sharing some lineage with the four-cylinder water-cooled Z900.

The Z900RS is intended to appeal to riders who are looking for a stylish machine with what Kawasaki describes as kerb appeal while also encouraging people with licences who haven't currently got a machine to return to two wheels.

The Z900RS has a new chassis and new engine specification, LED headlamp, LED indicators and tail-light, distinctive wheels, and a tuned 4-1 exhaust. Clearly taking its styling cues from the Z1, the new Kawasaki has black and red, black with gold and silver pinstripes or matt green paint schemes and logos in a 1970s vintage typeface, polished cam cap covers on the cylinder head and highlighted cylinder fins.

The Z900RS made its international debut on the Kawasaki stand at the Tokyo International Motor Show on October 25. The price is expected to be between £9,999 and £10,799.



Ethanol treatment is a star



THE RISKS OF leaving modern ethanol-rich petrol sitting in tanks and the damage it can do is becoming more commonly understood, especially in the winter when motorcycles see less use on the roads.

Spares supplier Wemoto is now selling ethanol treatment Star Tron in quantities from 30ml to a litre – enough to treat 720 litres of fuel.

The fuel additive is based on natural enzymes, which help to keep fuel delivery systems clean and petrol fresh. Star Tron helps starting, smooth running and burns fuel more completely increasing performance while improving fuel economy and reducing smoke and all other emissions. Ethanol attracts moisture and can form an ethanol-water combination which falls to the bottom of the petrol tank. This condition, known as phase separation, leads to gunk forming in a tank. Star Tron not only prevents gum, carbon and varnish build-up that can clog carburettors and fuel injectors, it removes it. It also treats old fuel, making it particularly good for those who choose to put their bikes away for extended periods of time and can be used as a preventative measure beforehand for greater peace of mind.

A little goes a long way, but Star Tron's special blend of enzymes makes it impossible to overdose fuel. 30ml of Star Tron, enough to treat 90 litres, costs £7.85 from wemoto.com.

Fantic to bring back the Caballero



THEY PRODUCED A 16-year-old's dream in the 1970s – the 60mph GT50 moped. They also made the 50cc and 125cc Chopper and one of the best small trail bikes of the era, the Caballero. Now, Italian manufacturer Fantic is bringing back that name for a brand-new scrambler-themed machine with a look that is both up-to-date and harks back to the brand's hey-day.

The Caballero 500 scrambler machine is powered by a 450cc 45bhp DOHC single-cylinder engine supplied by Chinese company Zongshen, matched with a host of top quality componentry including ABS disc brakes from Brembo. There are also 250 and 125 versions, and a black flat-track styled bike.

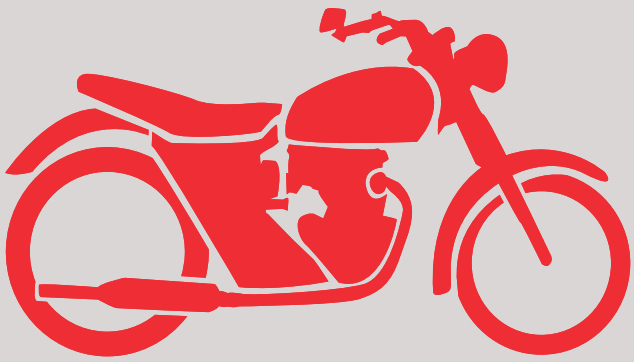
Fantic is already selling a range of Enduro and Supermoto machines, but this is the first time they have presented a retro style bike. Early indications are that the 500 Caballero will cost around £5-6000 and is expected to go on sale early in 2018. CBG

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Know of a show, club meet or event that would be of interest to fellow classic bike enthusiasts? Then feel free to drop us a line with some details and we'll do our best to include it so others can enjoy it as well.

Fancy a day out?

NOVEMBER

25 Malvern Drive-In Classic Bike & Car Autojumble. Three Counties Showground, Wye Halls and outside, Malvern, Worcs, WR13 6NW. West Midlands readers might want to take a trip out to Malvern for this, one of the last big jumbles of the year. A large classic car and motorcycle autojumble located in the recently refurbished Wye Halls. Lots of trade and autojumble stalls offering a great opportunity to locate those hard-to-find parts and accessories. Tel: 01484 667776 Email: info@classicshows.org or visit www.classicshows.org

25 LE Velo Northampton gathering. The Lamb, Stoke Goldington. MK16 8NR Tel: 01604 499858

26 Huddersfield Autojumble. Old Market Building, Brook Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RG Tel: Jeff 07795 505388 Email: jeffpff@hotmail.co.uk

26 LE Velo Lancs & South Lakes. Dunsop Bridge (meet main car park). Tel: 01772 782516

26 Ace Cafe London. Mud Pluggers Day. www.ace-cafe-london.com

26 Memorial Day, Coalhouse Fort. East Tilbury, Essex RM18 8PB. Tel: 01375 844203. www.coalhousefort.co.uk

26 Autojumble. The Clitheroe Auction Mart, Lincoln Way, Clitheroe BB7 1QW. www.hoylespromotions.co.uk.

DECEMBER

1 JANUARY ISSUE OF *THE CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE*

2 DECEMBER ISSUE OF *OLD BIKE MART*

2 Rufforth Autojumble. Rufforth Park, York. Tel: 01904 738620. www.rufforthautojumble.com

2 Southern Classic Off Road & Racing Show and Motorcycle Jumble. Finish the 2017 season in style at Kempton Park with a packed motorcycle autojumble and our off-road and racing show alongside. As ever there will be a huge selection of jumble stalls and trade stands offering bargains on all sorts of motorcycle items and project bikes. This special December event will welcome some beautiful machines from the off-road and racing worlds covering all the major disciplines. Among the many highlights will be Ted Davis' and Ernest Allen's famed Black Lightning / Watsonian sidecar outfit. Ace Cafe London will be offering a prize for Best Flat Tracker. General admission from 9.30am. Early bird entry from 7.45am (£10 per person). Traders/sellers entry from 5.45am, plots from £28 (pre-booked only), free parking. Free admission for under-12s. Kempton Park, Staines Road East, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex, TW16 5AQ. Tel: 01507 529435 www.kemptonparkautojumble.co.uk

3 Ace Cafe London. Bike Day + Ace Cafe Club Day Christmas Meet. www.ace-cafe-london.com

3 8th Southwell Toy Run. Start: Admiral Rodney, King Street, Southwell, Notts, NG25 0EH. Tel: John 01636 812838.

4 DECEMBER ISSUE OF *REAL CLASSIC*

7 LE Velo Lancs & S Lakes. Glasson Dock, near Lancaster. Tel: 01772 782516.

9 H&H motorcycle auction. At The National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham. The latest H&H auction at the NMM has a 1960 Royal Enfield Constellation entered with no reserve, a 1969 Triumph Bonneville that has been in the same family for 40 years, a 1960 Velocette MSS and a trio of Suzuki T20 two-strokes. Visit www.nationalmotorcyclemuseum.co.uk for details and www.handh.co.uk for listings.

Must go!!

10 Normous Newark Autojumble. Newark Showground, Newark, Notts, NG24 2NY. www.newarkautojumble.co.uk

10 Cambridge Bikers' Christmas Toy Run. From La Pergola, Harlton to Addenbrookes to deliver toys to the children in hospital over Christmas. 2016 saw 387 bikers and around 600 people join together for the run. Participants meet for breakfast at La Pergola before riding out under a full police escort and fully marshalled ride, right in to the heart of Cambridge and then out to Addenbrookes to meet patients, families, carers and staff, all supported by a 27-piece band playing Christmas tunes. Riders and pillions should each bring a toy or gift for someone in hospital. www.facebook.com/camtoyrun



SUBSCRIBE TODAY
Page 20



- 10 **Ace Cafe London.** Bike Day and Paws n' Claws Pet Food Run to Mayhew Animal Hospital in Kensal Green. Pet Food, bedding and toys are greatly appreciated. Donations can also be made on the day www.ace-cafe-london.com

- 17 **Ace Cafe London.** Bike Day and Xmas Toy Run. www.ace-cafe-london.com

- 17 **Haynes Bikers' Breakfast Ride-In.** Haynes International Motor Museum, Sparkford, nr Yeovil, Somerset, BA22 7LH. www.himm.co.uk

- 17 **Ace Cafe London.** Christmas Carol Service. www.ace-cafe-london.com

- 20 **JANUARY ISSUE OF *CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS***

- 20 **JANUARY ISSUE OF *CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE***

- 21 **JANUARY / FEBRUARY ISSUE OF *CLASSIC RACER***

- 26 **Ace Cafe London.** Cold Turkey Meet. www.ace-cafe-london.com

- 31 **Huddersfield Autojumble (Christmas Do).** Old Market Building, Brook Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RG Tel: Jeff 07795 505388 Email: jeffpff@hotmail.co.uk



- 31 **Ace Cafe London.** Bike Day and New Year's Eve Party. www.ace-cafe-london.com

JANUARY 2018

- 1 **JANUARY ISSUE OF REAL CLASSIC**

- 1 **VMCC (Essex section) New Year's Day Run.** Writtle Green car park. Tel: 01621 892606.

- 5 **FEBRUARY ISSUE OF *THE CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE***

- 6 **JANUARY ISSUE OF *OLD BIKE MART***

- 6-7 **The Carole Nash Classic Bike Guide Winter Classic.** Newark Showground, Drove Lane, Winthorpe, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 www.classicbikeshows.com
  With two new halls added to make more room for more clubs and stands, this magazine's very own Winter Classic will be bigger than ever before. Scooters and the scooter scene have always formed an important part of the show and for January 2018 the scooter halls will feature a Mods and Rockers theme.
  In a bid to keep things fresh, the format is changing slightly, adding various interactive attractions within (and outside) the halls to keep everyone entertained.
  The show is the perfect opportunity to blow off the Christmas cobwebs and explore hundreds of classic bikes on display, and it offers the chance for restorers to pick up a brand-new project to start for 2018, or find the parts and spares to complete a restoration and enjoy another year of motorcycling.

- 14 **Maldon British Motorcycle Owners' Club Bike Jumble.** Memorial Hall, Newland Street, Witham, Essex CM8 2AZ Tel: Roger 07787 847874 or Cliff 01245 262047.

- 17 **FEBRUARY ISSUE OF *CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS***





- 20 **Kempton Park Motorcycle Autojumble.** Kempton Park, Staines Road East, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex TW16 5AQ www.kemptonparkautojumble.co.uk

- 21 **Malvern Drive-In Classic Car & Bike Autojumble.** Three Counties Showground, Wye Halls and outside, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6NW Tel: 01484 667776. www.classicshows.org

- 24 **FEBRUARY ISSUE OF *CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE***

- 28 **'Normous Newark Autojumble.** The Showground, Drove Lane, Winthorpe, Newark, Notts NG24 2NY. www.newarkautojumble.co.uk

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE



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-CLASSIC- PRODUCTS

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BMW specialist Motorworks has come up with this ideal solution for turning your bike around. Made from tread-plate with a 420mm rotating top, it uses a heavy-duty ball bearing race to allow you to turn your bike around while on its centrestand.

It has heat treated feet that mean even if your floor isn't perfect, you can get it sitting safely, and I couldn't find a bike that didn't fit it. The turntable is nice and slim, though bikes that suffer from badly-designed centrestands (such as my BSA) can be harder to lift up... so I just use a slim plank either side of the turntable which makes it a lot easier. A superb addition to any garage and you can even use it in the workshop.

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motorworks.co.uk



I can see clearly now

DAVIDA AVIATOR RETRO T1 GOGGLES

I normally use workshop wrap-around safety specs, sunglasses or, if it's raining, motocross goggles, with an open helmet. But these Aviator retro goggles are superb. Beautifully finished, they are made in Switzerland and have superb optical clarity, unlike the cheap fighter pilot-style rubbish I've used in the past. Yes, they're expensive, but my last visor for a full face helmet was £55, which brings it more into perspective.

The Aviators feature small vents to aid demisting and they are narrower at the sides, which helps when looking over your shoulder – this is where I find motocross goggles let themselves down. Or I could fit mirrors…

They are obviously designed with a Davida helmet in mind, but I use them with an Arai open face with no problems and they should fit any make. Plus all parts are available separately, should anything need replacing. I'll try to look after these.

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davida-helmets.com

Green Hell

WUNDERLICH ISDT SCRAMBLER KIT

R nineT Scrambler owners can now get a look that mimics the 1970s International Six Day Trials bikes and improves off-road manners, too.

The Wunderlich kit can be bought as a whole or individually.

It includes a headlamp cowl with small yellow fly screen, adjustable handlebars, brake and clutch levers, aluminium cut-down mudguards, steel tubular rear subframe with built-in lights and numberplate holder. Tank cover and race number ovals add to the look, while new rear suspension units, adjustable Paralever strut and a fork kit help performance.

There's no end of extras, but the above should give you an individual-looking bike with better off-road ability.

Prices vary
nippynormans.com





The calendar you ARE allowed in the house

ANDY TIERNAN CLASSIC CALENDAR

Classic bike specialist Andy Tiernan has again released a calendar with all proceeds going to the East Anglian Air Ambulance charity. Last year, this helped raise over £1600 for the cause.

The wonderful artwork on the 2018 calendar is by Mike Harbar (classiclineartist.com) and will focus on the theme 'two-stroke motorcycles'. If this year's is anything to go by, it should be a belter. You can pay by cheque payable to 'East Anglian Air Ambulance' or by PayPal to AndyTiernanCalendarDonation@outlook.com

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Toasty

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Winter may be coming, but why should that stop us? This heated vest is worn under your jacket and will wire straight into a 12 volt bike, while six volt bikes can still enjoy the smugness with the optional lithium battery pack, which should last 2-3 hours, depending on what power setting you are using.

I've used many heated clothing makes and the Keis feels lightweight and unobtrusive. It uses micro carbon fibre panels instead of wires and are so hardy the vest can be put in the washing machine. Finish and detail are excellent and there are also gloves, inner gloves, jackets and trousers in the range.

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keisapparel.co.uk

Oops upslide your head

SURREY CYCLES AMAL GP SLIDES

These T3GP1 or 2 slides are a new product unique to Surrey cycles, but the GP range of carbs have been out since the 1950s. Originally the slides were made in three separate parts, the top part of the slide normally brass was turned, then drilled and tapped for the cable screw and the small tapped hole for the needle clip. Then using a tube it was machined, brazed or silver-soldered together, then was put back into lathe and finished.

The new Surrrey cycles unique slides are machined from solid billet brass. The needle clip post is machined in with a T-cutter, the key to prevent the slide turning is machined in with an end mill and they have the advantage of being offered oversize of + 1 thou and +2 thou oversize, as most of the GPs will have wear. Dimensionally they are identical to original apart from outside diameter. There are T3GP1/2, T5GP1/2 slides in stock at present and the T10GP1/2 and TT slides shortly. Running issues and manners should be dramatically improved.



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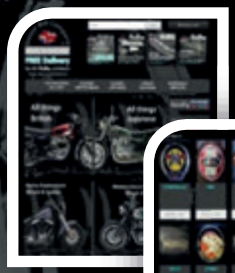
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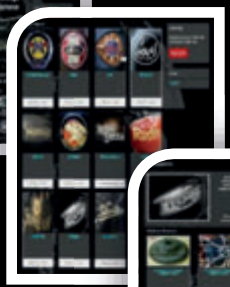


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A perfect brace

When you commission your dream bike to be built from scratch, if you can't decide what you want, why not have two?

WORDS MATT HULL
PHOTOGRAPHY JASON CRITCHELL

Standing in the workshops of JMC Classics and Restorations, between a multitude of Vincents in various stages of undress, I'm faced with two very interesting machines. First glances confuse me – modern chassis parts, wide tyres and a gleaming finish blend with older style fairings and engines that are clearly old-school. As the lads in the workshop are frantically stripping carbs, I have another minute to take a closer look at these two intriguing, beautiful machines.

"They're for a client, Frank Hodder, a collector from Australia, who wants them finished and shipped over so he can show them at his daughter's wedding in a few weeks," explains John Mossey, who along with his small team, has created both these bikes to a tight, demanding brief. "He knows what he wants and money isn't an issue."

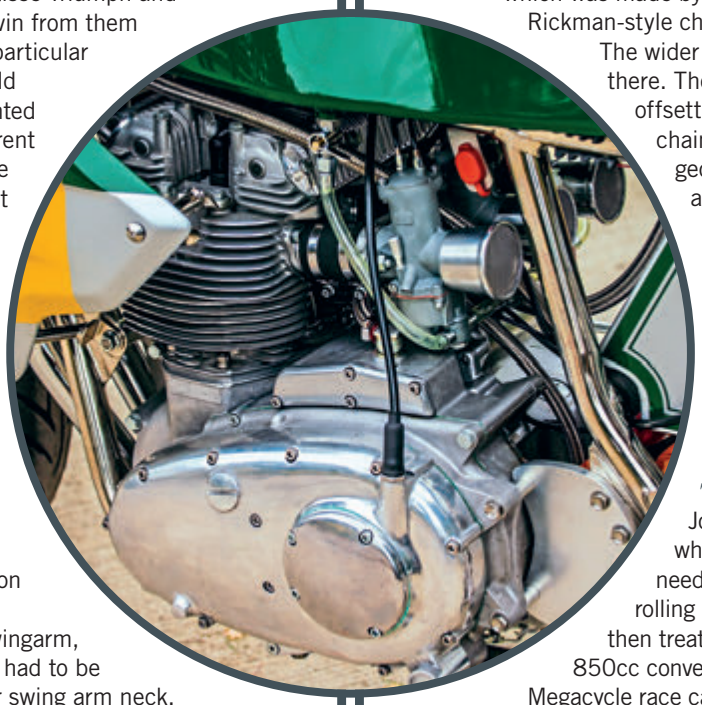
Oh to have listened more intently at school...

Modern brakes, suspension and geometry meet classic frame design and engine. A perfect pairing?

METISSE TRIUMPH

Frank chose JMC to build him a Metisse Triumph and a Norton after he had bought a Norvin from them previously. "He asked if I'd build a particular spec of bike, I said yes... but it would cost and take time. Because he wanted everything bespoke and it was different to the Norvins we build, I knew there would be a lot of trial and error – but I never realised how much – and then he said he wanted two," says John, who isn't known for showing emotions, but was clearly relieved the two bikes were, at last, finished.

Stumbling blocks seemed to be in place from the start. The Metisse frame is made from 4130 chrome-moly steel tube which is nickel-plated once finished, but one of Frank's main requirements was a modern-sized rear tyre. A 150 section was specified on a WM4 rim, which wouldn't fit the standard Metisse swingarm, or the frame. So the bespoke frame had to be redesigned to accommodate a wider swing arm neck, with the swing arm pivot-plates widened by 1¾in (44.5mm). It also needed the top shock mounts moved out to be in line with the new swing arm, which was made by Seeley, as Frank didn't want the Rickman-style chain adjuster shims.



The wider rim didn't stop the hassles there. The frame also had to accommodate offsetting the engine by 20mm for the chain to have a straight run and the geometry was changed slightly to accommodate the 38mm Grand Prix Ceriani forks and the Ohlins rear shock units. Brakes again were specified, with Brembo 320mm semi-floating discs gripped by Brembo Goldline four-pot calipers. A twin-pot Brembo looks after the rear disc, again a semi-floating number.

THE ENGINE

John bought a Triumph T150, which gave him all the parts he needed, then he was able to sell the rolling chassis. The 750 triple was then treated to a full Peckett and McNab 850cc conversion including pistons, barrels, Megacycle race cams and gas-flowed race head with centre plug conversion (the original 14mm plug hole is bunged, with a smaller, 10mm hole drilled and tapped



in the centre of the combustion chamber – the idea is to give a better burn and more midrange, though John isn't that convinced). Bottom end benefits from a polished and balanced crank and Carrillo rods, with power going through a belt-drive conversion to the Quaife five-speed gear cluster, with lower first gear. Oh, and there's an electric start there, for ease.

Frank even specified the fuelling system, with a bank of three Wassell Mk.1 concentrics fuelling the engine and Pazon ignition providing the spark. But being such a unique set-up, John had problems with the initial fuelling. "We had to change the slides, needles and spray tubes just to get it to rev through the range, but luckily our experience got us there in the end. As the engine beds in there may be some small adjustments but it all works well together." The Pazon ignition system is totally programmable and runs a single-phase alternator with a rectifier and a warning set up in the dash.

Competition Fabrications made the exhaust system, which through no fault of their own had to be adjusted three times, as Frank wanted the downpipes to exactly flow with the downtubes of the frame. But because of time, the bike couldn't go to their workshop for them to offer it up as it was being formed. "It was all trial and error," says John. The end result though, is a seamless 3 into 1 system, perfectly following the brief.

Norton gets a last minute check at JMC, while Metisse has the carbs fettled. Study the photographs – the attention to detail is stunning

Fairings on both bikes are from Walt Seigl, a custom design house from California, which had designed some retro fairings to fit the modern MV 675 range of bikes to give them a more traditional look. Frank saw them on the internet and he wanted the front fairing on his bike.

"They are similar in style to older race MV fairings – they'd tried to make an original fairing fit the modern MVs but it didn't work, so designed their own. They're made from glass fibre but are really nice quality and suit the bike just right," explains John.

The clocks are Smiths Chronometrics, but made to look like Ducati clocks and the paintwork was beautifully applied by FD Motorcycles in Great Dunmow, Essex. "They're the best," John simply says.

With the main bike parts in place, it was then a case of the seemingly limitless small jobs that had to be done by the JMC workshop.

"We had to make the wheel axles and spacers, the engine plates, caliper carrier plates, all the spacers, brackets, everything," says John. "He didn't want oil in the frame, so we had to make an oil tank and find somewhere to fit it. If it needs hanging off the frame we made it – all you get from Metisse is a frame. And the rear seat unit had to have Ducati 916 rear lights with LEDs." All the bolts feature wasted heads, all done individually – the detail is astonishing.

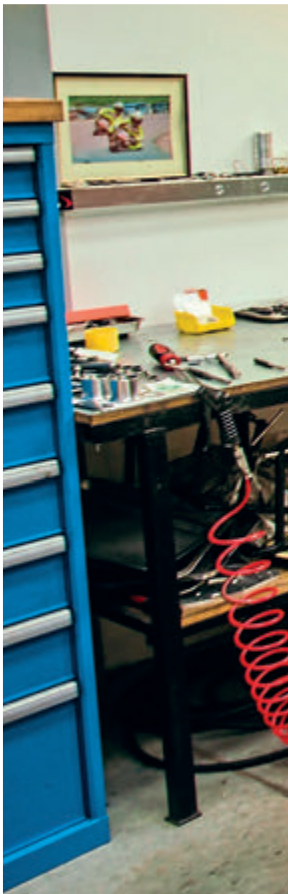
THE FINISHED ARTICLE

With the bikes heading off to be crated up the following day, John was still finalising the carburation, but was happy overall. "It's a little small for me, I've never met Frank, but I hope it fits him!

"I'm just trying to get it to pull better from low down, with the extra power and the Quaife gearset we've knocked five teeth off the rear sprocket, but I know I can get that torque curve better. Tickover isn't brilliant with the cams, but it pulls away! And it handles well – the geometry is like a modern bike."

Specials are never finished, but with it being shipped to the other side of the planet, it must be good to think you've got it as nice as you can.

Frank wants the Metisse as a fast road bike –I think he'll be pleased. JMC got a dating letter from Metisse to be able to register it, it's dated from the age of the engine.





JMC Classics

Vincent rebuilds and restorations are the mainstay of JMC Classics, as well as building JMC Egli-Vincents (Vincent engines in an Egli frame) and JMC Norvins (Vincent engines in a Featherbed frame).

John Mossey has been working with classic bikes for 29 years. He started as an aircraft fitter at British Aerospace in Hatfield, but when his department moved to Manchester he and his wife were young and had just bought a flat. So he started buying and selling Triumphs and Nortons. He never intended to specialise in Vincents, but likes working on them. "My mate's dad had two and we tried to start them at lunchtime, but we never could. I never went seeking them, just sort of fell into it. They're a unit-construction engine and gearbox, which you can completely build up before you fit it into the frame, unlike other engines you have to put the head on, then the gearbox, then the clutch once it's in the frame. It's an engineer's engine.

"The JMC Eglis and JMC Norvins started because I bought some frames in 1995 from a guy in Northampton and shortly afterwards new Vincent crankcases came available and I thought it would be good to build two. It just stemmed from there.

"They've changed quite a lot since then and make really nice bikes to ride."







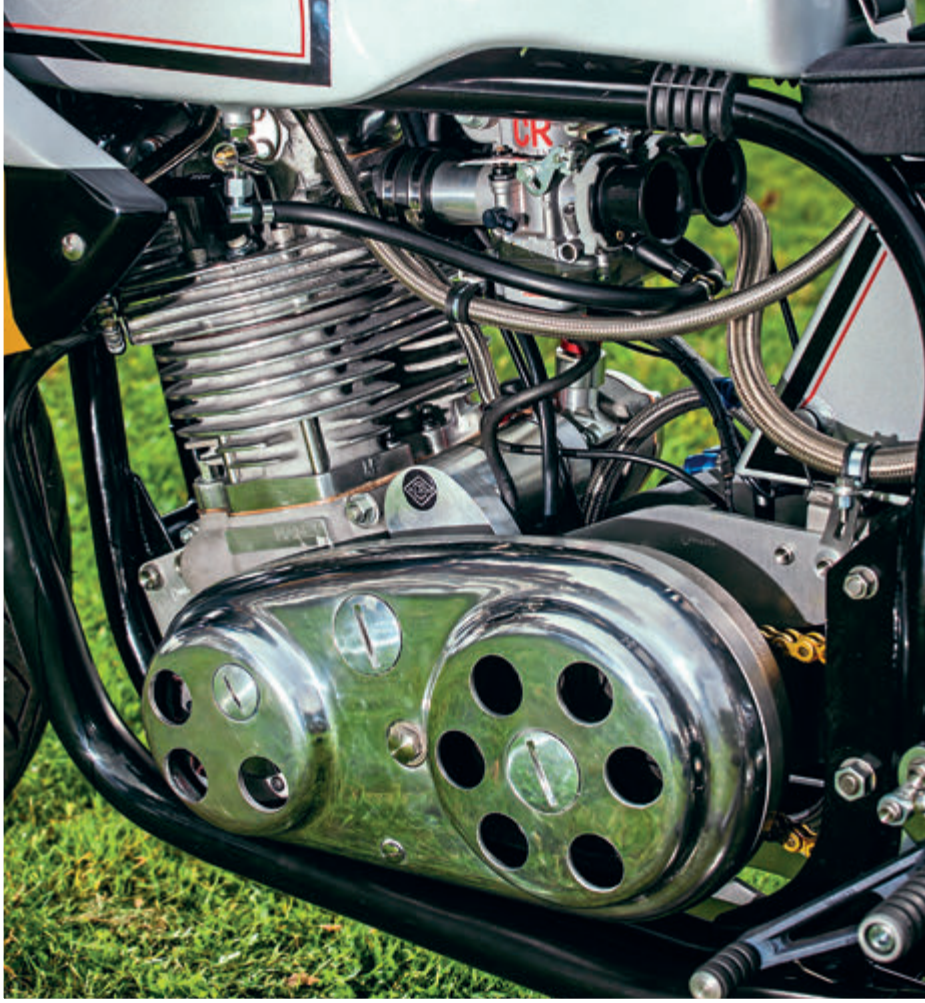


THE NORTON

The other half of the deal was a Norton, following similar lines to the Metisse. Burgess makes the Featherbed-style frames for JMC's Norvins, so was given a similar task as with the Metisse – of stretching the swing arm pivot points to take another Seeley swing arm for the WM4 wheel. The engine was offset by 15mm and an offset gearbox sprocket helped get the chain in line. Front end, brakes, fairing and paintwork followed the Metisse build, with a different Norton-style seat unit.

The engine for this had to be Norton, but Frank wanted a monster. Steve Maney provided the 1007cc twin, based loosely on a Commando unit, which came in bits. "It's a race engine," says John, "which is designed to run 11.1 compression, but to be more friendly on the road, we needed to get that down to 9.1 so the electric starter could turn it over. It was a





headache but we got there with plates, a really large copper head gasket and thick copper base gaskets to lift it up. But then the push rods and followers were too short so we had to make new ones."

For the twin, Frank requested 36mm Keihin carbs from Allens Performance, with the same Pazon system looking after the electronics. An Alton electric start and belt drive conversion to the TT Industries gearbox completed this mammoth power train.







The mainstay of JMC is Vincent restorations and Norvin and Egli-Vincent builds. "They're engineers' bikes," says John Mossey



DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE?

For a man who has twin boys (Luke and Jamie Mossey, excellent racers themselves), it must be hard to pick a favourite. "I prefer the Norton," exclaims John, without a moment's delay. "It's more comfortable, easier to ride and the torque is incredible. Being a twin it was easier to set up and it handles like it's on rails."

Would you take on builds like this again, John? "They've been a difficult build and I've spent the last two years thinking about little else – but we learned a lot, so yes, I'd do it again. But not for a little while."

Can we ask prices? "The Norton ended up at £52,000 and the Metisse closer to £55,000. But when you look at the cost of parts, for example £12,000 for an engine, £2000 for a gearbox, belt drive kits are £700, the Triumph headwork was £1700 and £1000 for the Carrillo rods (on the Triumph), it all quickly adds up."

When these bikes get to Australia, Frank wants them displayed at his daughter's wedding, but after that their primary purpose will surely be to raise a smile on the face of the man who used to be the importer of Bridgestone tyres. Which one will he favour? Who knows, but he's a lucky man. CBG



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Paul Miles

Photobombing

Do you like looking at photos of bikes for sale, only to spot something more interesting in the background? Just Paul then...

WHEN THE RIDING day is over and we've hung our hat, both literally and figuratively, it's nice to reflect on what we might have seen and experienced earlier that day.

For me, irrespective of how much I've enjoyed the machine I've been mercilessly, erm, evaluating, it's usually a time to covet somebody else's bike I spotted earlier out on a run or in a car park. Stop tut-tutting, you do it, too. The ante is often upped via a quick scan of internet auction sites to, you know; check out if an example of my chosen bike du jour happens to be for sale not too far from me. In my case, not too far is anywhere in the northern hemisphere, but that's perhaps, for another day.

So, there I am, idly searching for a, say, Suzuki T305 Rebel, and I spot one for sale. I click, all is revealed. This fine-ish example of Mr Suzuki's smokiest work only needs a battery and would fly through an MoT test, I no longer wonder why the vendor hasn't done that already; it's their loss, I can order a battery online, have it delivered in 24 hours and be on my way to the MoT station where a piece of A4 paper and potential vast profits await.

Unless it's a dealer, the bike has usually been extricated from an overstuffed garage or shed, rarely under its own motive power, although it was always running when last put away. What does that mean? Running out of lives? Oil? Anyway, there it is, on the driveway, doing its best to stand up unaided, like a proud old veteran. The pictures are often taken with an ancient phone camera with a dirty lens, so an element of image enlargement is required. As I zoom in its impossible not to look at what else may, or may not, be lurking in the stygian darkness of the space beyond. There's occasionally a flash of numberplate, a teasing glimpse of a curvaceous handlebar, perhaps even the tease of a petrol tank. Whatever it is, or more likely isn't, I'm instantly hooked. No longer interested in being part of the Rebel alliance, the bike I want most in the whole wide world is the one I can't quite see.

The vendor is contacted. I ask if I might pop over and see the Suzuki, in which I now have no interest, purely on the pretext of poking around his shed to see what the other bike might be. I know I could just ask, but that would be weird and I wouldn't want him to think me strange.

Two days later, I'm pulling up outside a semi-detached house in Tring, there's a scruffy old Suzuki awaiting inspection. Whoever said the camera never lies, lied.

I meet the seller, he's very nice and we drink some tea. The Rebel won't start, of course, it must be some ethanol in the ignition wires and we agree there's surely enough oil in the world to make proper petrol and not rely on agricultural land to fuel our old rattlers. It's actually not too bad, but nowhere near as nice as the one I'd imagined riding just half a week earlier. I quickly perform the mental calculations about the costs of what it'll require to be elevated to keeper status and stop when that number exceeds the value of the house I'm sitting in. It's time, I must, I have to, ask.

"Oh yes, I've a few others in there, a couple of my dad's old bikes and the one I'm working on at present. I'm only selling the Rebel to fund that project." We enter the shed, I feel like Howard Carter but with less pith. There's a Hinckley twin, there's always one of those. The project is a crumbling CX500 that's going to be a bobber (tangential advice moment – they never get finished, if you are building one, quit now). But the really interesting stuff belonged to dad. Old carpet is pulled back, the motorcycling equivalent of breaking the clay seal, revealing…

Oh, a Mobylette step-through that's been used as a sea anchor and a CB175 that gives lie to the statement you can't break a Honda. Okay, I wasn't expecting a Brough Superior, but this, really?

In desperate need of air I even start to assess the bobber CX before agreeing a price on the Suzuki I don't really want. I trailer it up and bring it home. A friend pops over to view the latest acquisition, noting my waning enthusiasm. I sell it to him at a small loss, that's what friends are for, relieving you of bikes and money, it's going to be a café racer I'm told.

A week later, the wounds are healing and I'm over the whole, sorry mess. My friend pops over, on his freshly MoT'd Suzuki Rebel café racer. It only needed a battery, apparently… CBG

"The vendor is contacted, I ask if I might pop over and see the Suzuki, in which I now have no interest, purely on the pretext of poking around his shed to see what the other bike might be. I know I could just ask, but that would be weird and I wouldn't want him to think me strange."

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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Paul D'Orléans

The iGen meets the filthy motor

Paul could have just found the answer to finding the next generation of classic bike enthusiasts

IT DOESN'T TAKE a crystal ball to see the future of old motorcycles. My inbox today brought mixed news – the VMCC magazine (Vintage & Classic) cover story features its excellent 'training day' scheme, while the Atlantic delivered awful statistics about the effects of iPhone use among young folks, newly dubbed the 'iGen'.

The training day scheme allows girder-fork newbies to sample other people's bikes, ranging from 250 Rudges to the club's inherited Brough Superior SS80. I can't think of a better way to cultivate a new crop of vintagents than letting riders play with old bikes, although the impact of the scheme is small compared to larger societal forces pushing young people away from motorcycles.

Those trends are the subject of the Atlantic article – 'Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?' The author doesn't mention old bikes, but she didn't have to – the statistics were applicable to all types of motoring. Simply put, teens (at least in the USA) have a totally different relationship with vehicles than previous generations. They're less prone to broken bones and boozy parties (because they don't go outside), pregnancy rates have plummeted (because they're having sex later) and they don't get into auto accidents, because they aren't learning to drive until they're older, especially if services like Uber are available where they live. They aren't interested in getting jobs while teens, mostly because they don't want to escape home as earnestly as I did (to engage in the activities listed above). What they like to do is look at small screens, growing anxious and depressed the more time they spend online.

The motorcycle industry is chewing its fingernails over the future, wondering who will buy its products in 10 years. The average age of a motorcyclist in the USA is 48, a figure eight years older than in 2001. If that trend continues, only dead people will ride bikes by 2040, when everything goes electric anyway. Reading about the iGen makes it clear – among screen-gazers, motorcycles are no longer seen as a badge of identity, or even simply fun. 'Vintage motorcycle owner' is a double-edged term, as it now applies to both rider and mount. I've been looking at the same faces in the North American Velocette Club for nearly 30 years. I used to be the lad, now I'm the dad and my elders have gone elderly, with club-rag memorials more frequent than rallies. While a few under 40s have joined recently, where is the fresh wave of youngsters to replace those falling from the saddle?

Let's take a page from the social media playbook and track the movements of young club members to our doorstep. How did they get interested in old bikes and where did they see images that compelled them? It might have been this very mag, but I doubt it. The paradox of the iGen is that the same medium driving teens from wheels is also the best way to reel them in. In the last five years, photos and videos of motorcyclists having a good time (and looking good) on social media have brought more young riders into the fold of vintage motorcycling than any other source. One of social media's most potent effects for the young is FOMO (fear of missing out), which can be devastating when one feels left out, but also motivating if one sees an opportunity to have fun and do cool stuff. Streaming photos of people having a blast with beautiful bikes is the best advertising we have, and the primary source of such imagery of late is the new-wave custom scene. I entered that world reluctantly in 2006, while judging a major concours that included custom bikes, at the tiny tip of what is now a major worldwide movement. What drew me to a couple of builders (Shinya Kimura and Ian Barry) was: 1 – they were my age, and 2 – they were fanatics for vintage machinery. That's proved to be the case with 100% of the customisers I know – they collect old bikes and include that passion in their media presence. Hundreds of 20ish riders purchased a vintage motorcycle after discovering the chopper/café racer/street tracker custom scene via social media.

I note the VMCC has no Instagram account, although the AMCA does. I reckon the biggest bang for member bucks – for every vintage and one-make club – would be to hire an enthusiastic youngster to post images on Instagram from club rides and archives. Let them guide the content, because we (greybeards) are out of touch with what's groovy. One club president recently lost his job by declaring a disinterest in younger members. He had supporters, but the rest saw the dire need for fresh faces.

It's a simple proposal and an adaptation of the Centaur's (how apropos) method – use the poison to find the cure. CBG

'The motorcycle industry is chewing its fingernails over the future, wondering who will buy its products in 10 years. The average age of a motorcyclist in the USA is 48, a figure eight years older than in 2001. If that trend continues, only dead people will ride bikes by 2040'

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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The Thruxton 'Nine hours' race, 1956

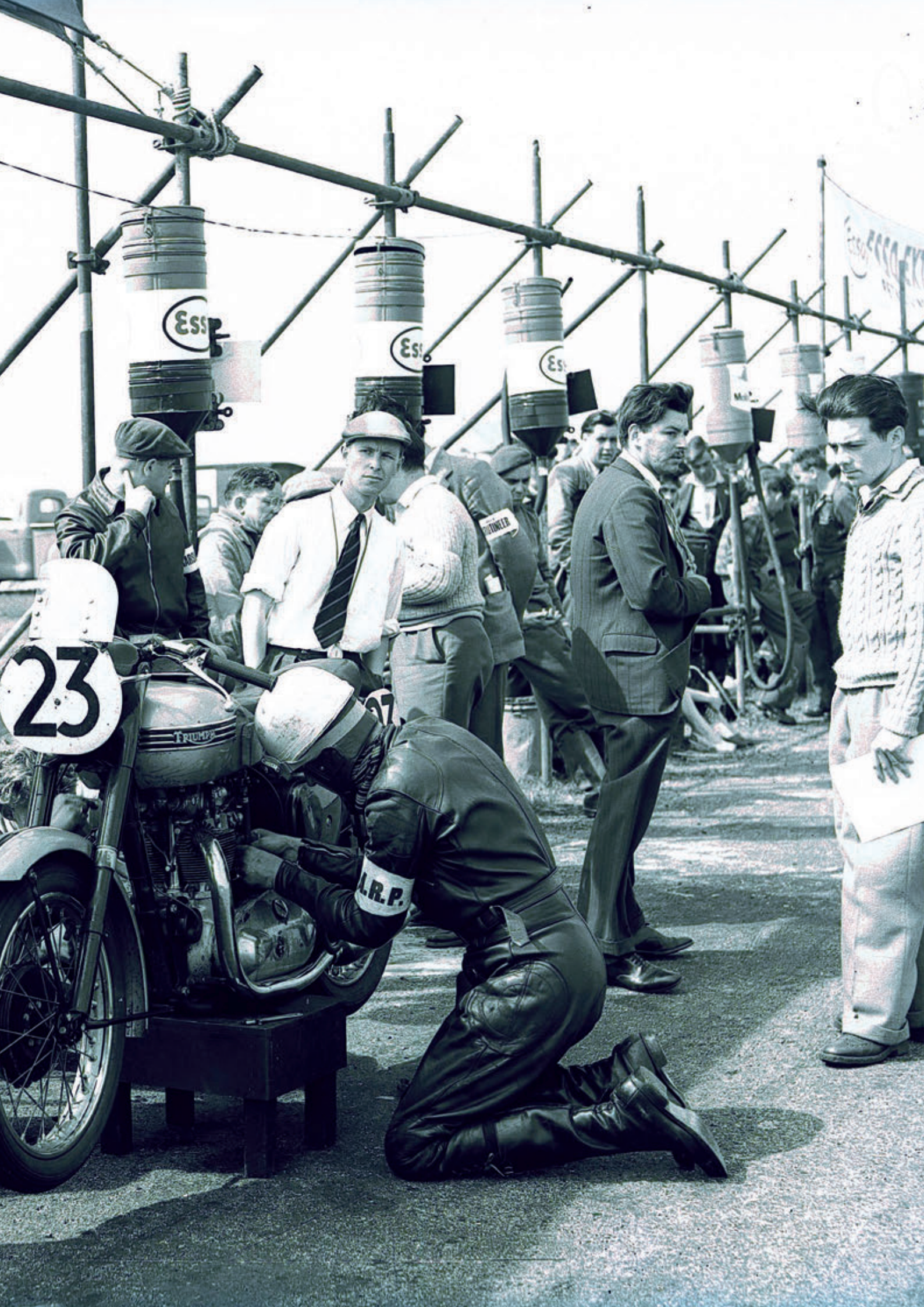
60 machines lined up for the second running of three nine-hour races, held from 1955 to 1957. The restricted permit was given for the 2.7574 mile course around the old airfield and attracted many well-known racers of the time, such as Geoff Monty and Geoff Tanner, Bob McIntyre, Dennis Christian and Eddie Dow, the previous year's winner.

The 350cc class included 10 Gold Star BSAs, three Velocette Vipers and a Matchless G3LS. The 500cc class was BSA territory with 22 entries, while four Triumph T100s, a Matchless G9, Norton Model 88 and Velocette Venom, new for that year, added to the mix. 750cc bikes included Triumph T110s, Royal Enfield Super Meteors, a Norton 99 and a BSA A10.

Noon signalled the start for the arduous nine hours and the production bikes set off. Crashes and mechanical issues meant an attrition rate of around four bikes per hour, until 9pm came and the pairing of K W James and I I Lloyd won on their 350cc BSA Gold Star. They'd covered 131 laps and their average speed was 72.24mph – made even more incredible that this included pit stops for rider changes and taking on both fuel and oil.

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Mark Williams

A convenient truth

Williams realises that you don't have to be radical to run a Harley that works

I'VE NEVER BEEN a big fan of Harleys, and I think with good reason. First of all, back in the days when I first began scribbling about bikes, Harley-engined chops were all the rage and in the *Bike* magazine offices, virtually synonymous with the marque. And then I rode one, with a hardtail and monster-long forks which was quite simply a death-trap.

Only slightly less so was the 1978 XLCR Café Racer which we had on extended test at *WhichBike?* In its day this was a bravely-conceived and handsomely butch-looking machine that almost killed me – when it went into a humungous and uncontrollable 70mph weave on London's Westway during a Friday evening commute.

The next, and I think you'll now understand the last, Harley I ever tested was some XLXYZ Fat-Boy-Low-Bob I had to ride non-stop from Daytona to Miami in 1982 against the British Airways check-in clock, which took me and my spine several days to recover from.

And ever since then I have remained totally unmoved by the seemingly endless parade of the only moderately dissimilar permutations that have merged from Milwaukee, the only exceptions being the new-ish, liquid cooled 750s that actually emerged from a factory in India. Until, that is, my friend Lisa suddenly emerged from the alleyway across the road one Sunday morning on a very loud, and rather different looking machine that clearly was of Harley origin.

Closer inspection and conversation revealed that it was technically a 1994 1200 Sportster, but with a 96 engine which had been the personal transport of the boss of Hereford's Shark Motorcycles, purveyor and builder of interesting machinery and everything else you'd expect of a good bike dealer in these parlous times. Lisa jokes that she went in there looking for a new helmet, and ended up buying the Harley. As such, it is an excellent example of a purpose-modified bike, the purpose in question not being to sit all-shiny on a show stand, but to be got out there and ridden.

To which end the bugbear of all Harleys up until very recently, namely a front end that wallows and brakes that don't, have been replaced by the relevant items from a 1200 Suzuki Bandit. Instead of the stock 21-incher, the wheel itself is a actually a repeat of the 16 x 90 device that sits at the rear end, both shod with Avons, and the whole menagerie is held in place by custom-machined billet yokes which allows for geometry which enable the bike to steer great. And of course it's nice and low.

As far as Lisa can tell the engine is stock, but the 2-into-1 Supertrapp exhaust system and the delicious racket it makes suggest a few more ponies have been liberated which also presumably involved a bit of a re-jet.

Other bits and pieces have been junked in favour of subtle and quality replacement such as the handsome Le Pera leather saddle, oval halogen headlamp, a sharks fin (yes!) taillight, some sexy black but reassuringly bright LED indicator lights and a smaller speedo. Of the two available Sportster tanks – who knew? – it has the larger, 2.5 gallon 'King' version, which gives it a range, according to Lisa, of "enough", because even though she's adjusted the suspension from its original "bone hard" to comfortable, I personally wouldn't want to ride it for more than 45 minutes without a leg-stretch.

Of course Harley itself has for decades cannily offered a wide range of rather expensive Screamin' Eagle add-ons that make its vaguely agricultural vehicles perform and look better. However the point of bikes like Lisa's, or it seems any Harley of any vintage, is that without lavishing squillions on factory-approved fol-de-rols, judicious application of aftermarket accessories and components, albeit sometimes from other manufacturers' parts bins, can make a big difference to bikes that are going to get ridden, but also admired. CBG

And ever since then I have remained totally unmoved by the seemingly endless parade of the only moderately dissimilar permutations that have merged from Milwaukee, the only exceptions being the new-ish, liquid cooled 750s that actually emerged from a factory in India

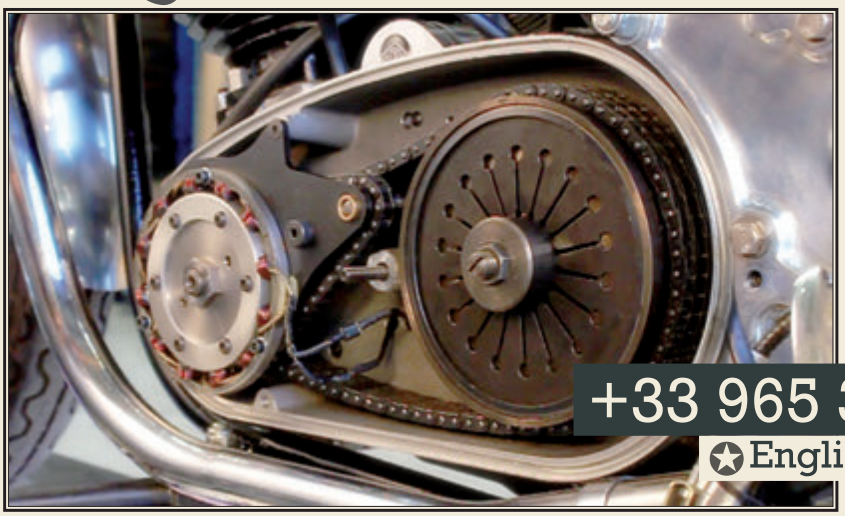
Who is Mark Williams?

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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National Motorcycle Museum Live November 4



MORE THAN 3000 people braved the cold and wet to visit the fourth annual National Motorcycle Museum Live open day.

Carl Fogarty, John Cooper, Michael Rutter, Steve Parrish, Pete Hickman, Maria Costello and Freddie Spencer were just some of the famous names to entertain the crowds with an amusing chat show, while the museum was free to go round, with more than 1000 bikes to see, telling the story of the British bike industry.

Lots of stalls and autojumble stands were also on hand, with a barbecue outside and a new feature, the Start Up, where, thanks to the Brackley Festival of Motorcycling and Phil Morris Racing, people could see and hear some of the rare and exotic race bikes fire up. CBG





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COMING SOON to *RealClassic* magazine

A British bike bonanza!

Join Frank Westworth and his RealClassic crew for a feast of Britbikes

EVERY MONTH, *REALCLASSIC* magazine offers an assortment of entertaining, eclectic and occasionally eccentric articles about old bikes.

Most of the magazine is written by readers – lifelong riders who share their experiences of the classic motorcycles they repair, restore and ride off into the sunset.

Traditional British bikes take centre-stage in the December issue. Roger Slater (he of Laverda fame) aims to improve an Ariel Square Four engine and Alan Cathcart reveals a Triumph prototype from the late 1950s that got off the drawing board but never quite made it to production.

We learn what was going on behind the scenes at BSA in the late 1960s, with some of the original reports from the time and motion men.

Rowena Hoseason goes bargain-hunting for Velocette singles, while other *RealClassic* regulars ride a cammy Norton International as well as a totally tidy TriBSA. Finally, Frank himself tries a modern alternative – a big banger street scrambler – to see how it stacks up against its British equivalents.

RealClassic is also refreshingly inexpensive at just £2.50 per issue, including UK delivery, on a six-monthly subscription.

You won't find the monthly *RealClassic* magazine at UK newsagents – it's available by mail order, subscription and at major bike shows.

If you've not seen a recent copy, then navigate to www.real-classic.co.uk/free-issue where you can download a **FREE** digital edition to see if you like it. You'll also find links to subscribe to the magazine or buy the most recent issue at real-classic.co.uk or call 01507 529529.

REALCLASSIC #164, DEC 17

- Norton Inter
- Tricksy TriBSA
- Big trouble at Small Heath
- Triumph T200 neverwossa
- Velocette singles buying guide
- Ariel Square Four engine rebuild
- Rebuilding Teledraulic forks
- Odgie's A65 flat-tracker project
- Jacqueline Bickerstaff's PUBtalk
- A brilliant day at the bike museum
- Bangers and MASH!













Stafford show shines again

STAFFORD ONCE AGAIN drew the crowds, with a top attraction being this year's guest, World Superbike star Aaron Slight.

To celebrate the speedy Kiwi, collectors brought together versions of the infamous Honda RC45, along with two of Barry Sheene's Suzuki RG500s, many of which fired up in the *Classic Racer* magazine's GP paddock. Bonhams' auction had bikes from all eras for sale, with a 1914 Henderson Model C Four making £113,500, with £2,752,416 of sales on the day.

The club stands looked fantastic, the VMCC restoration theatre was a big success and the autojumble was constantly busy.

Pop January 7, 2018 in your diary for the next big show, the Carole Nash *Classic Bike Guide* Winter Classic show, at Newark Showground, Nottinghamshire.







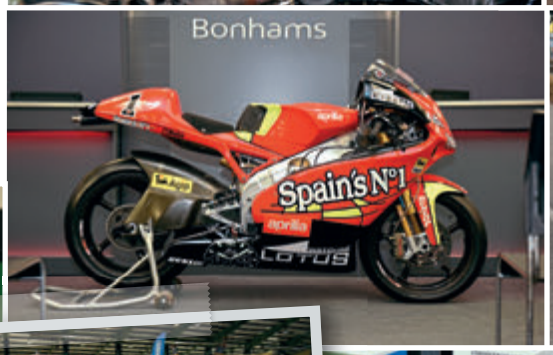





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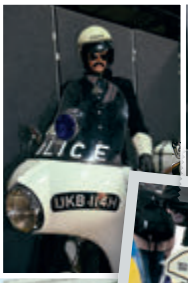

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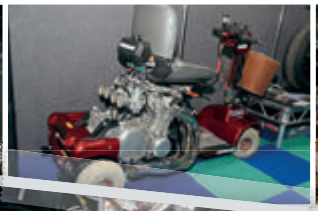


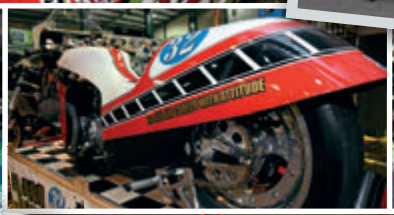

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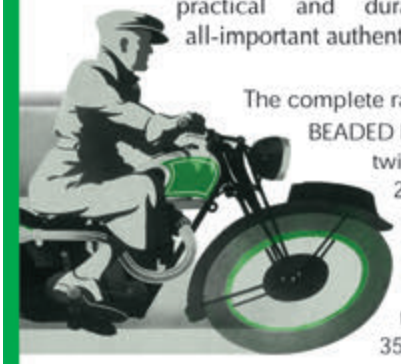
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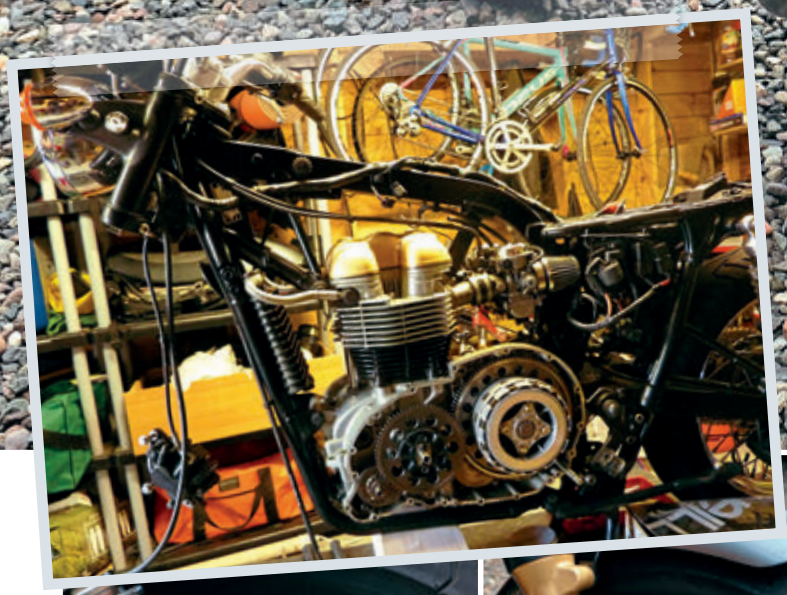
Thruxton thriller

Allan Jackson wanted a new Triumph Thruxton, so took this non-running Bonneville and created his own. Friend of Allans, Stuart Urquhart, recalls the story behind the superb job this first-time builder has done and shows what can be done with a little help from your friends.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART URQUHART


TRIUMPH









Allan Jackson is a man who rises to a challenge. A keen snowboarder and track day enthusiast, he's also a highly skilled joiner who's built his own home from the ground up; not once, but twice.

So taking on his first custom motorcycle build was not a daunting prospect when Allan decided to rescue a friend's laid-up 2003 Triumph Bonneville. By his own admission, Allan wouldn't boast too highly about his spanner skills, however, with a little encouragement he managed to get the 2003 Bonneville back on the road before he hit upon the idea of building a special.

Allan takes up the story: "I have long admired the new wave bike builders that feature in *Classic Bike Guide* and on specialist websites such as Bonnefication and Pipeburn.

"My friend Stuart's mildly customised Thruxton never failed to turn my 'Gixer' head and planted the seed of turning my Bonnie into a special. Discussions

followed, and over several pub nights we formed a plan to create a 'faux' Thruxton – one that paid deference to Hinckley's new for 2017 Thruxton but with a few ideas of my own in the mix. In truth, I lusted after a 2017 model Thruxton but just couldn't afford the considerable asking price, so a poor man's Thruxton would be my second choice."

Allan began to scour the internet and magazines for examples of special builds that he liked. Trawling custom suppliers' websites also became an evening pursuit as he compiled a list of desirable parts to help transform his standard Bonneville.

Hinckley Bonnevilles have been around for over 15 years and are now affordable and in plentiful supply. The early 790/865cc models (2001-08) require only simple jetting upgrades to allow the fitting of aftermarket exhaust systems, while the later EFI models (2008-15) may require remapping of their engine management systems. Customising Hinckley Bonnevilles has become very popular and a whole new aftermarket industry has grown up around this trend – one being driven by the custom build scene – backed by specialist websites and custom exhibitions.

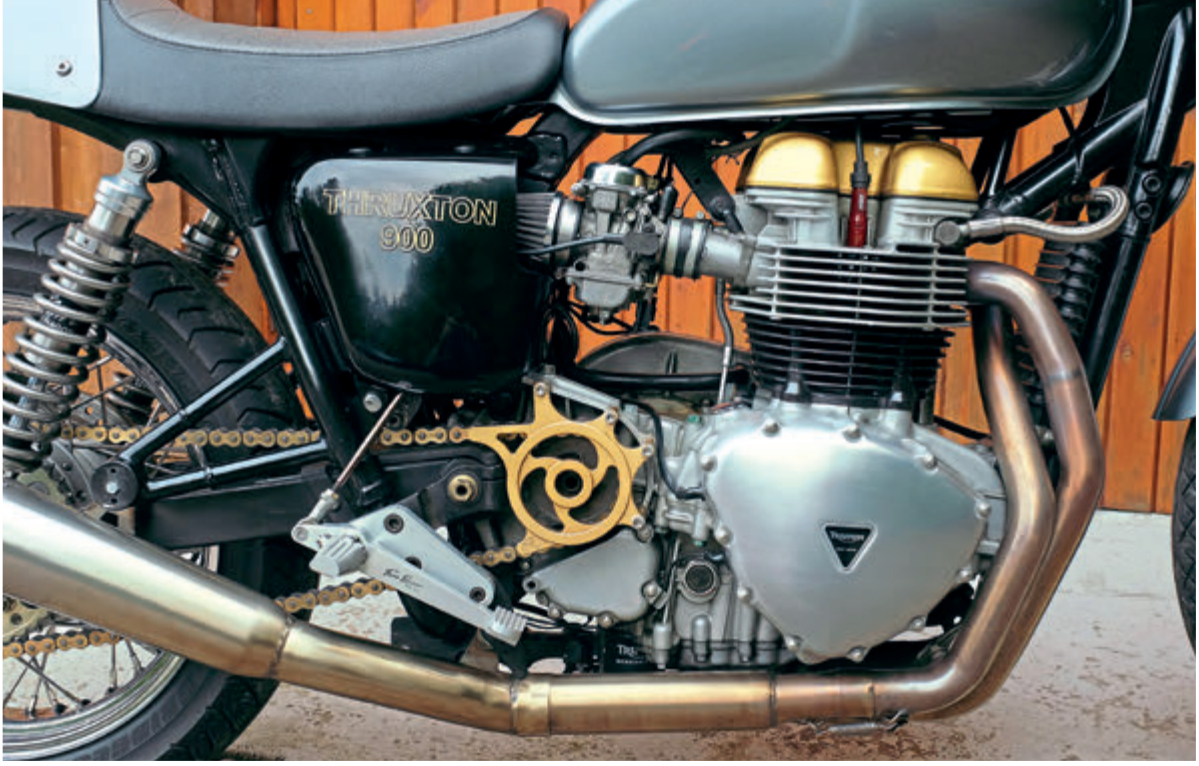
It's not until you start looking closely that you notice the work and attention to detail Allan and his friends have gone to for this tired Bonneville to look as good as this.

In similar fashion to the Triton cafe racer craze of the Seventies, the modern Bonneville has become the platform from which to build an urban street cruiser or cafe racer of your dreams. For as little as £3.5k you could find a low mileage example that only requires minimal upgrades that are easy to do – if you are familiar with a spanner you are already half way there. All you need is imagination, commitment and a plan. Buy one and get building is Allan's advice!

So on spare weekends we began to strip down Allan's Bonnie. I had several key Triumph parts such as an original Thruxton petrol tank and new glass fibre front mudguard, side panels and seat hump from specialist firm Mototone, parts that I had accumulated for my own Thruxton Special, but no longer required. This would allow Allan to set aside his original Bonneville parts to accommodate any



'I became concerned that my inexperience was the cause of some baffling problems'







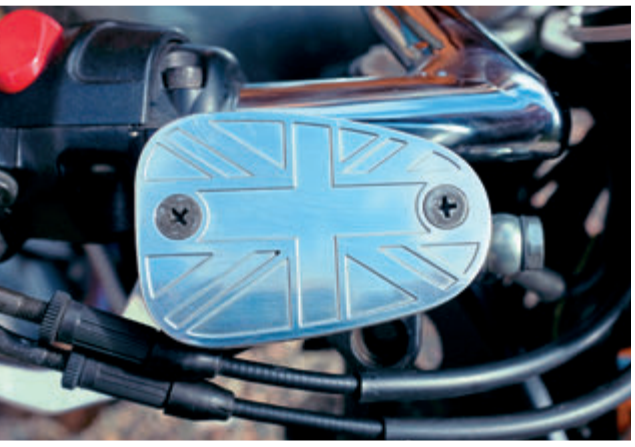
future change of plan... and he had big plans.

"As my Bonnie came with garish chrome engine casings I began to hunt on eBay for used ones," explained Allan. "I was determined to remove any unsightly corrosion, but in contrast to the traditional hand-polished alloy cases on Stu's Thruxton I wanted to achieve a lightly brushed effect on mine.

"I soon found and successfully bid for a used primary casing and this was stripped of its factory lacquer before I experimented with wire brushes and different grades of emery paper. After countless trials I achieved the brushed steel effect I was after with the help of a dolly-mop and fine grade emery paper. I was chuffed with the result and more searches on eBay added a timing case and rocker box to be similarly modified. I was having fun!'

As work progressed, I began bombarding Allan with links to suppliers of quality custom parts and left him to search for items that fulfilled his brief. The stripping and subsequent rebuilding of many parts was a team effort, although Allan was solely responsible for styling his 'special' – often in consultation with experienced friends who could offer a valued opinion. Onerous tasks such as the removal of defunct mudguards, airbox, indicators and old fasteners were very much a team effort. The relocation of the battery, its electrical gadgetry and the rear brake master-cylinder and reservoir was another test for creative collaboration.

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Testing of electrical components sourced on eBay caused much head scratching too, especially when Allan's Alchemy mini-bullet indicators and trick LED rear strip light refused to work. Even the addition of inline load resisters failed to spark up the lighting assembly. Not until a friend and electrical boffin identified that current was dropping via the consul's indicator warning light bulb did we finally have working lights.

"I became concerned that my inexperience was the cause of some baffling problems," recalled Allan.

"Removing parts was relatively easy but adding new custom parts was often fraught with problems. The hassle we had with LED lighting was a setback that caused much angst, to the extent that I began to worry I was throwing away money when buying custom parts. I was determined to fit whatever took my fancy but the combined indicator and rear LED strip light proved problematic and resulted in many nights' work solving problems; both with mounting the component seamlessly to the seat hump and then wiring it into the main electrical harness. However, friends always came up with solutions, and with their help I soon built up confidence with my input.

"Another problem was that my Bonneville seat turned out to be too wide for the Thruxton seat hump and this sent me on a wild goose chase for a Thruxton seat. The search became even more complicated by my choice of metallic pewter and gold paintwork for the Triumph's bodywork – influenced in part by the 2017 model Thruxton. This called for a matching colour-coded seat and I was thrilled when a two-tone grey seat eventually turned up on eBay that looked purpose made for my special.

"More discussions during the winter build resulted in a further strip-down when I decided nothing less than gold painted forks and rocker covers would satisfy my vision for the final look. Fortunately, one of my friends owns a paint and bodywork shop and all my paintwork was prepared by hand, before being

offloaded for a professional paint job.

"Many ideas percolated from discussions during the rebuild stage and Stu was influential in persuading me to address the standard Bonnie's handling. Thus Norman Hyde progressive fork springs and Hagon top quality and multi-adjustable Nitro shocks joined the build. I had already decided to keep the excellent Bonneville engine as stock, but we added K&N chrome filter stacks from British Customs and a gorgeous T-Tec two-into-one stainless exhaust system. Triumph World supplied several oversize jets for us to test with the new exhaust system and kindly provided free advice. I spent many sleepless nights deliberating over the correct style of exhaust for this build and I only considered systems that enhanced the urban and aggressive look I was after, as well as ones which would provide an evocative exhaust note over the stock silencers. The T-Tec stubby silencer and crossover two-into-one pipes are great value and their quality is phenomenal. The silencer even has a removable baffle for MOT purposes - a part which will no doubt remain 'boxed' post MOT!"

Allan sourced the mock clip-on Dunstall handlebars from Burton Bikes. Motone supplied the embossed Union Jack front brake reservoir cover and the gold anodised sprocket guard. New sprockets and the obligatory rear gold chain were supplied by Norman Hyde and a host of smaller but necessary parts and fasteners came from Triumph World. Wheels were shod with new Battlax BT45s and once the Triumph's paintwork returned from the paint-shop the build took a giant leap forward.

Fitting the wheels and replacing the newly-painted gold front forks permitted the assembly of a rolling chassis to which we temporarily added the sparkling new metallic grey petrol tank and T-Tec exhaust system. Only then could we could take a step back and admire Allan's creation in all its splendour.

"I was over the moon with the completed Triumph and became very impatient to finalise the build. I just wanted to fire her up and go for a ride," he remembers. "I can vividly remember the excitement as we finally fitted the new drive chain, bolted on the exhaust system, oversized carburettor jets, K&N filters, fuel lines, front mudguard and connected the battery before a final tweak of the spark plugs.

"In went new oil and fuel and suddenly we were poised to start her up. My honour was to press the starter and the engine immediately fired-up and ran well on full choke. But unfortunately the engine began misfiring as soon as I backed off the choke and opened the throttle. Then the carbs started spitting and choking. This was extremely disappointing, especially as the Bonnie was running perfectly before the rebuild. Undaunted, Stu suggested we should continue to warm her up and take her for a test run. So I threw on a jacket and helmet but as soon as I blipped the throttle and selected first gear, I could tell something was amiss as the Bonnie hiccupped out onto the open road. When I returned I swapped gear with Stu and he returned moments later with a thumbs down in acknowledgement that we did indeed have a problem. Needless to say I was gutted!"

Following our first test run the disappointment on Allan's face was palpable, but I knew the problem would be simple to diagnose, especially when considering that the engine would run perfectly at low revs, but only began misfiring above half throttle. So I reasoned the cause was most likely a faulty new component that we had introduced unintentionally during the rebuild. After systematic checks we ruled out the new spark plugs, coils, HT leads, the ignition timing pick-up probe on the alternator, and the action of both CV throttles and chokes. I was baffled.

However, we began to suspect that the new jets might be too small for the T-Tec open exhaust system, or that we had been supplied with a duff coil. We decided to contact T-Tec for advice on jet sizes and as a failsafe we purchased a new substitute coil from Triumph World.





'I remember the hairs on the back of my neck prickling to the sound of that howling exhaust'



However, with new larger jets and another coil to play with the engine continued to misfire.

"This was a low point in the build," recalled Allan. "I was desperate to have some rideouts on the finished bike and I knew Stuart was equally frustrated with the engine's power loss and his inability to diagnose the fault. It was only when we returned on another day, suitably refreshed, that we stumbled upon the problem. Stu had explained to me that the new jets might have been fitted with their separate, miniature fuel-metering crowns upside down (an easy mistake), or that one of the carburettor's fuel valves had become jammed, thus shutting off fuel to one carburettor.

"So once again we dropped the float bowls for a look inside the twin Keihin carbs – however, both jets and fuel valves proved to be correctly seated. While we had the carburettors open Stu decided to open the fuel tap and check fuel was being freely delivered. Immediately we discovered that fuel starvation was the problem.

"The lack of fuel, however, was not down to the shut-off valves as we had initially supposed, but was caused by the fuel tap itself. This was an unexpected discovery, because I had fitted the fuel tap from the Bonneville's original fuel tank and it had worked perfectly all year – so we had overlooked an obvious source. Once a replacement fuel tap was fitted the engine performed seamlessly and the bike sang. I remember the hairs on the back of my neck prickling to the sound of that howling exhaust – I was ecstatic! At last, we had arrived at the finish line. However, one job remained



– the fitting of custom rearsets as supplied by Tom Bros of Italy – after which she would be primed and ready for the road."

I know Allan is thrilled with his Thruxton inspired special. The six-month build was an enjoyable experience and the end result is testament to Allan's creative skills and his determination to complete the project. The blend of metallic gold and pewter grey paintwork works well and his choice of custom parts blends comfortably with the styling of this reworked Hinckley Bonneville. The LED seat hump and T-Tec exhaust look trick, as do the understated transfers and brushed alloy engine casings. This very special Triumph screams 'ride me' from every angle.

I count myself as being fortunate to be involved with the project. Fortunate too that I have enjoyed several test rides since its completion. The ride position is very similar to my own Thruxton's, and the Dunstall bars look racy without adding discomfort to the mix. The Tom Bros rearsets are well-suited to the 'racy' Dunstall bars and are certainly an improvement over the stock pegs. Hyde's progressive front forks and Hagon's Nitro shocks deliver exemplary and confident handling. You feel very much 'locked in' as you sweep through bends soaking up the thrilling sensation of a Sixties cafe racer.

The ultra-smooth 790cc Bonneville engine suits the chassis well and delivers classic performance and impressive torque

The ultra-smooth 790cc Bonneville engine suits the chassis well and delivers classic performance and impressive torque all the way to the magic ton. The brakes perform well, and even Triumph's heavily-criticised rear anchor did not fall short. This is a machine for spirited riding, accompanied by an evocative and blissful soundtrack. It is a motorcycle the rider will never tire of, it is totally addictive and fun. Best of all, Allan's special turns heads and draws an appreciative crowd whenever and wherever it is parked – proof that our willing apprentice got the design template spot-on, first time. Now 'Action Jackson' can add 'Special Bike Builder' to his CV.

Allan concluded: "I would encourage anyone who fancies creating their own custom to have a go. I was flabbergasted to discover so many specialist dealers that offer a varied selection of exciting and innovative parts for all manner of motorcycles – just about anything is possible. The only limit is your imagination. Now I'm at the other end of this amazing experience I would do it all over again. It was a fun and worthwhile distraction through the long, cold winter. And should you decide to build your own special, at journey's end you'll have your own unique motorcycle – a machine that is very much a part of you, and one that will provide endless pleasure and stimulating conversation with your fellow bikers. Now what can I do with my old GSXR, I wonder?" CBG



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DVLA rules slowly become clearer

I see from my latest copy of your excellent *CBG* mag that on page 10 (Classic News) there's an announcement 40-year-old bikes will be exempt from MOT. I was aware of this from the DVLA website announcing such plans from May 2018. The article is a little misleading by saying if your bike is more than 40 years old, which my 1978 BMW R100 RS will be in March 2018, then it will be eligible for exemption. You then go on to say that "cars and bikes manufactured before 1977 will not have to take an annual test", so I deduct from this that bikes and cars manufactured before 1977, you mean 1976... which would mean that the bikes and cars would be 41 and 42 years old by May 2018 respectively ? Could you please clarify as DVLA clearly says from May 2018? Cheers!
Clive Drake, Cornwall.

CBG: *Many thanks for your email, Clive. They do like to complicate things, don't they? As far as we are aware your bike will be exempt, as long as you register it as a classic in March. And if you haven't already, check the news section on page 40 this month. There's been more DVLA clarification on the 'modified' area of the rules too.*



Well done Triumph for seeing smaller sense!

So finally Triumph has seen sense and is looking to the future. It is now joining forces with Bajaj in India to increase its market, and it sounds like they will be looking at producing smaller bikes. What a great idea.

There are a great number of us older bikers who struggle with the new, heavy bikes and at our age a 500cc or even 250cc would keep us on the road as riders.

It would also be a defence against all of the Chinese Bonneville lookalikes currently on the market, albeit, some of them are very good. But the market in this country for smaller retro bikes, like the earlier smaller Bonnevilles and Tigers, has been ignored for too many years.

Disingenuous BMW

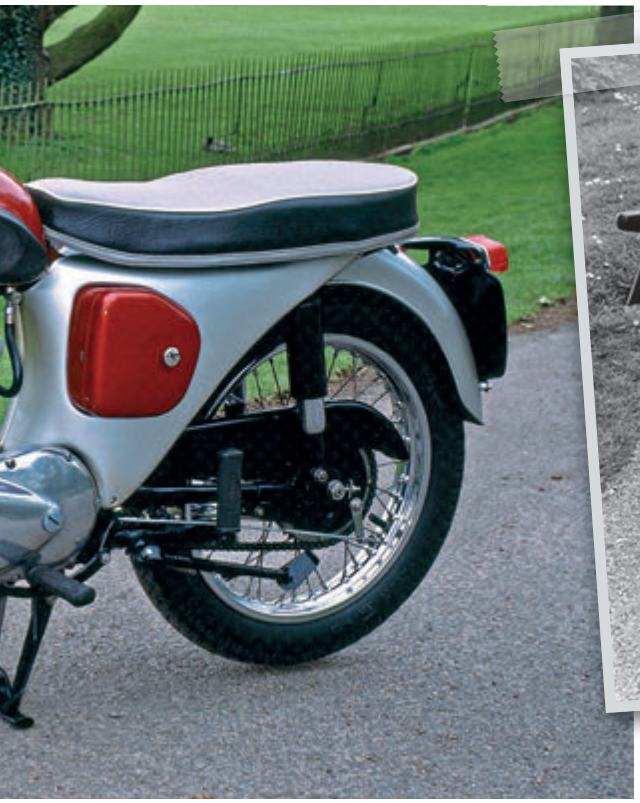
Kevin Hill is somewhat disingenuous in bemoaning the decline in BMW custom motorcycles (*CBG* November, page 83).

He and his ilk have spent the past few years buying up all the affordable Boxer twins, slapping some paint on the tank, removing the mudguards and fitting an exhaust system, some knobbly tyres and a brown seat cover, and then trying to flog the results to people who don't know any better for £7000 plus. Yes, I do wish I'd thought of it, but then I like to sleep at night.

If Mr Hill is moving on to affordable Japanese bikes, we can only await the day of the unaffordable Superdream and CX500. Good luck to him, and I hope the Emperor's new leather jacket is uncomfortable.
Paul Smith, Cumbria

CBG: *I fear you may have missed Kevin's point, which was that BMW has beaten the custom shops to their own game, by introducing the R nineT range, which with low-rate finance deals and low depreciation looks very attractive. The custom bike scene has, and always will, divide opinion, as does people's take on style – whether that be by their mechanical and artistic limits or the size of their wallet. As far as your attack on the professional custom scene, there are many people out there who would like something different, but don't have the know-how to do it. The hours that go into professional design, fabricating and modifying to a customer's brief quickly tots up – and they are a business after all, not a charity. Some are good, others not so, but if someone has bought a bike, it's their right to do what they wish to, isn't it?*


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Yamaha SRX600 easy to start? Mine isn't!

Many young bikers (sons and daughters of old rockers) want to own and ride retro bikes.

Well done Triumph, you finally woke up.

Paul Dennis

CBG: *We're big fans of what you're saying, Paul. Smaller bikes are easier to ride and on the right roads, a hoot to ride!*

I just read the Yamaha SRX600 article in the Oct 2017 issue. I have owned an SRX600 since new in 1986, the only year they were sold here in the US.

I must disagree with Mr Melling about the hard starting being a myth. Mine has always been hard to start, especially after sitting a while. If it isn't fully warmed up it is almost impossible to restart. I've disassembled and cleaned the carbs, I've installed a dyno-jet kit but it remains hard to start. I own three BSA B50s and a 1963 BSA Goldstar and the SRX is harder to start than any of them.

Jim Shaw, US.

Where are they now?

I have a subtscription to *Classic Bike Guide* and enjoy the many articles relating to bikes especially those around the 1960s. I would, however, like to trace a particular bike that I owned in 1969, namely a Norton registered DFT 509.

I have a photograph of this vehicle at my house. DVLA records show that it still exists but that it has not been taxed since 1983. I would very much like to trace this vehicle with a view to restoring it but it doesn't fit the criteria for DVLA to release that information
i.e. it has been involved in an RTC, causing an obstruction etc.

Some of my classic car magazines have a 'Where are they now?' section. Would you consider having that section in your excellent magazine? I am sure it would be of interest to both people looking for bikes and those who now actually have them.

Regards

Bill Went

CBG: *Dear Bill, thanks for your email. We don't currently offer a 'Where are they now?' feature, unfortunately. But would any of our readers know of this bike? If you do, email us at editor@classicbikeguide.com and we'll pass any info on to Bill.*

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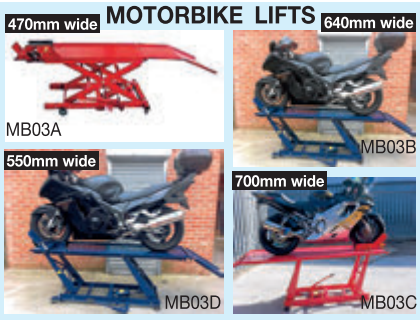
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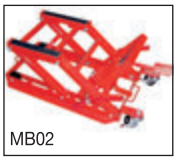
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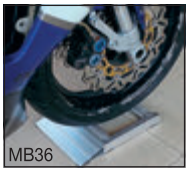

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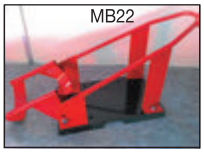

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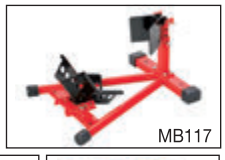

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Guy Martin collecting his new toy, Sept 2017

Trident racer

Guy Martin's Classic triple

When racer Guy Martin and engineer Les Whiston got together to build not one, but two Trident racers, the result was always going to be something special. In the first of two parts, Rob Davies takes a look at the background of these two fascinating people and the start of the build of the Rob North Trident for the classic TT.

WORDS AND PICTURES BY ROB DAVIES, PLUS EXTRAS COURTESY OF DENISE WHISTON

Most people, both inside and outside motorcycling, have heard of Guy Martin. The enigmatic, sideburned Lincolnshire lorry mechanic-cum-racer has become an adrenaline seeking TV legend and housewives' heart-throb.

Martin rose to fame in racing circles when he was banned from racing in BSB in the UK for reputedly slamming a laptop on the fingers of a notoriable series' boss, so went to Ireland to race in road races. Then followed the TT, where his unique character was always going to make him stand out and TV bosses whose channels cover the TT saw a possible new Fred Dibner-style character.

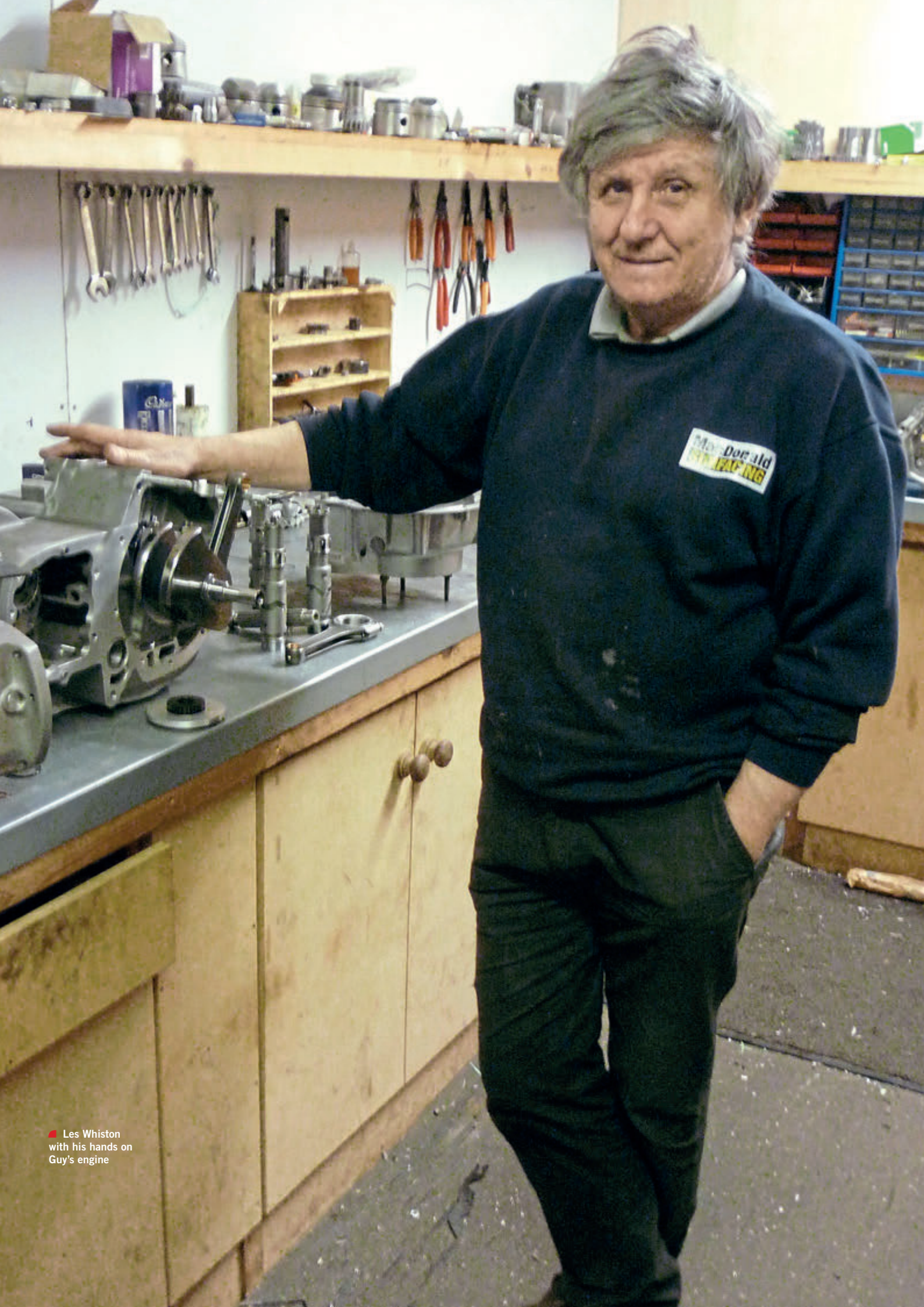
Thanks to his fascination with all things mechanical, allied to his tea-drinking personality, this has led to various projects such as: The boat that Guy built; his highly popular Speed with Guy Martin series and then the Wall of Death programme.

Guy's racing has continued, despite several horrendous high-profile crashes and TV commitments, but with a poor 2017 aboard Honda's new Fireblade, Guy's future racing plans are, as yet, uncertain... though he has recently said he would like to concentrate more on classic racing.

So we all know Guy, but who is Les Whiston?

Les, along with his wife, Denise, owns Rob North Triples, trading as Trident MCS. Les is one of the most amiable, quiet, unassuming, yet talented engineers one could wish to meet, and he is the man that Guy Martin went to when he wanted a classic Trident racer built.

Certainly there are great pleasures and satisfaction from designing and building a successful racing bike from bare metal, but there are equally significant challenges too. For instance, this bike was to essentially test out a brand new engine and gearbox – and on the introduction of any unfamiliar equipment, there will be a big learning curve, not only in the initial fitting, but in getting everything working in conjunction with the fuel delivery system. Then, when the bike is completely finished, there follows a very necessary and detailed testing period where every part has to be sorted and refined. This is where many



Les Whiston with his hands on Guy's engine

problems can and do present themselves, and each one has to be rigorously analysed and put right.

As the only supplier of the popular Rob North Trident and Rocket three racers, Les has a very busy business to run, making and maintaining customer bikes, while designing and making spare parts, or finding quality suppliers to manufacture them for his customers' triples. Not only that, but as time went on and Guy's bike took up more and more of Les's time, his other paying customers were pressing him to get their bikes finished too. All of this put increasing pressure on Les through the first half of 2017 to try and get the bike ready for the 2017 Classic TT.

It is also important to note Les has now designed and supplied parts for two bikes for Guy. The first was the amazing bike that Guy used on the Wall of Death Challenge in 2016, which he pretty much assembled himself from the parts Les supplied (roughly 85% of the bike) and much later, the road racing machine. And just as a note for anyone who may have watched the wall of death challenge and saw Guy riding a V-twin Indian – this was done more as a promotional effort, and the Rocket Three was only seen at the end. That's TV and big business for you.

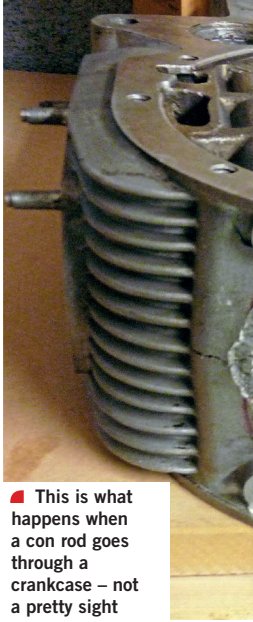
However, it's the story of the up-and-coming 2018 TT racing bike I really want to tell. It all started with a bundle of tubes and empty crankcases when I entered Les' workshop near Dudley in the West Midlands in April 2017. This is where he runs his company with his wife Denise and able assistant Steve. And this particular Rocket Three was to be no ordinary machine, being solely developed for racing - and Guy Martin personally.

The Isle of Man TT prompts many opinions, both for and against. Some would like to close it down altogether and say they have sound reasons for that – just look at the statistics of injuries and fatalities. But since the early years of the 20th century, racers have wanted to see how fast they can go and beat their rival racers and machines. This is the greatest thrill for them, I don't think that urge will ever pass... and I for one do not want to dictate what other people – or the viewing public – should do with their lives. But that's enough of the philosophy and on with the bike.

Classic Bike Guide: Les, you are now aged 66 and you're already on Guy Martin's second bike. How did your career in motorcycles start?

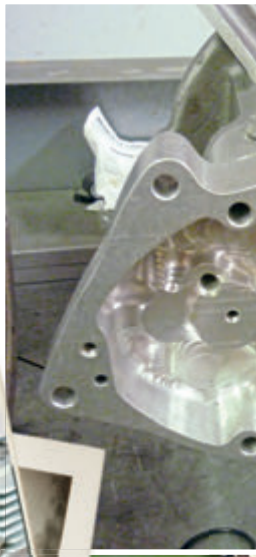
Les Whiston: Back in the 1960s I left school and started work as a trainee motorcycle mechanic for Tom Swallow, a small motorcycle shop in Oldbury in the heart of the Black Country. When Tom retired I moved to another bike shop in Wednesbury owned by Roy Peplow, and if you lived in the Black Country and owned a motorcycle, then these were two names that you knew well. Sadly the days of the small motorcycle retailer have gone, but back then there were quite a few around, but that's another story.

Roy was a works Triumph rider, he was a fair boss and he drilled into me the value of every small nut and bolt, especially if it was simply lying on the floor. And when any part broke on a bike, he would say that there must be a reason for that breakage, which began a lifelong study into design and materials technology for me – always ask questions, it's the route of all real knowledge. I went to my first TT event back in 1967, the golden jubilee year when Hailwood and Agostini were battling it out for supremacy. I loved the noise and the atmosphere and I have been going back

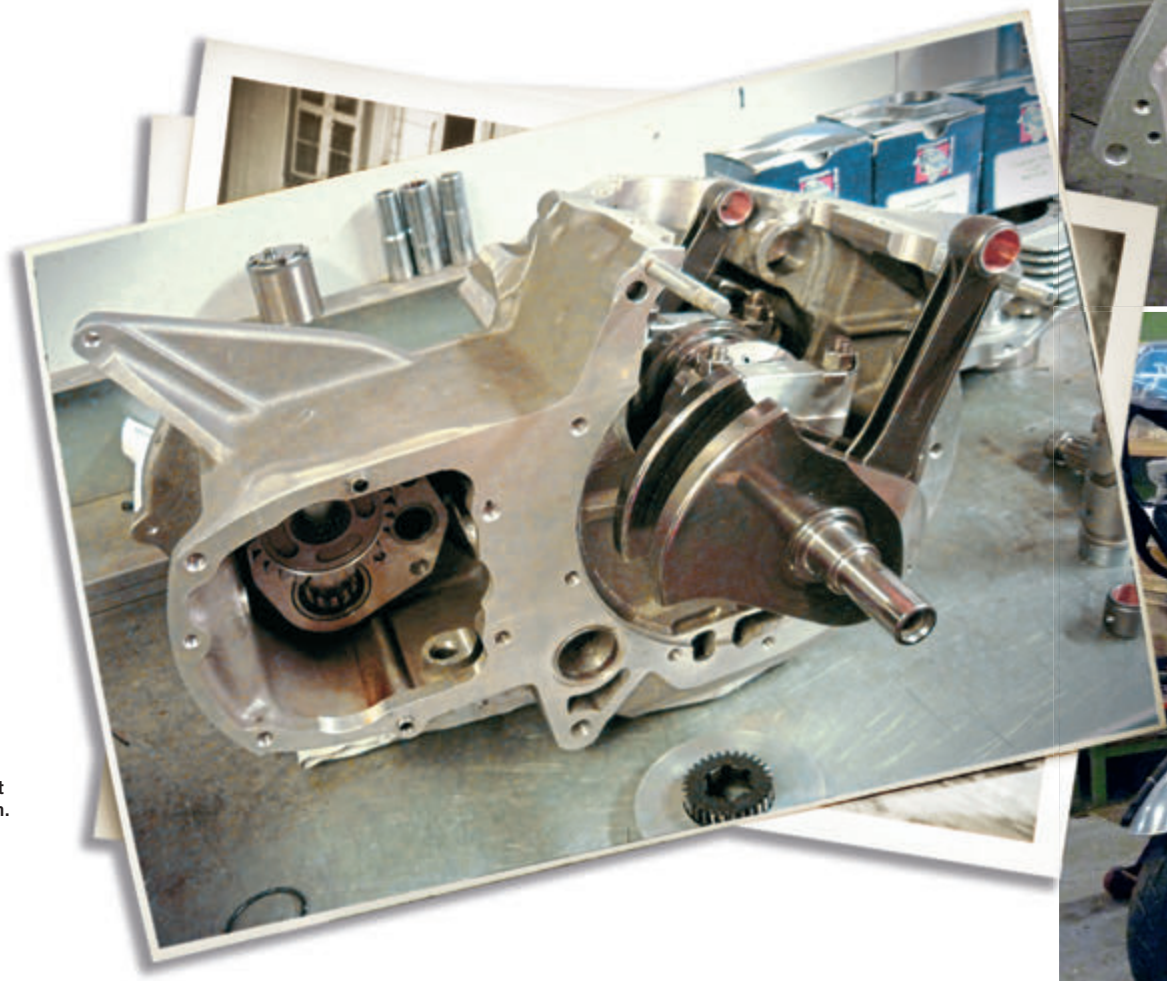


This is what happens when a con rod goes through a crankcase – not a pretty sight

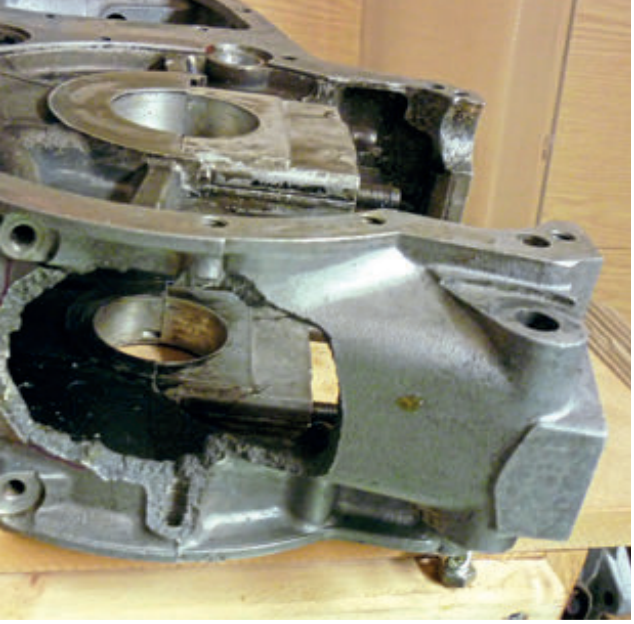








Crankcase halves from an old design but an entirely new pattern. Highly polished crank with new rods. A set of crankcases goes for around £2200





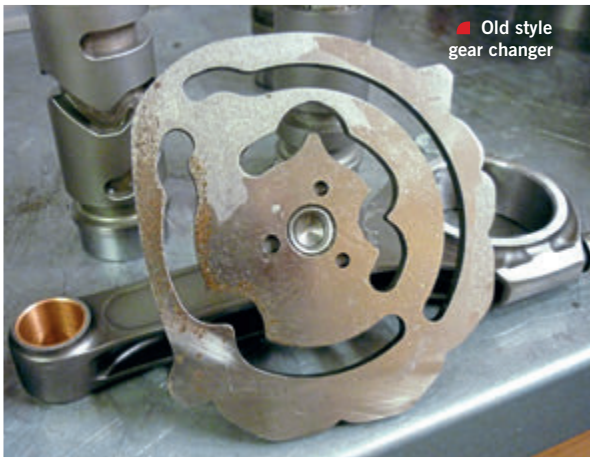
Barrels, gasket and high compression piston. Barrels and set of three pistons costs £1800

New style drum gear changer – no false neutrals with this

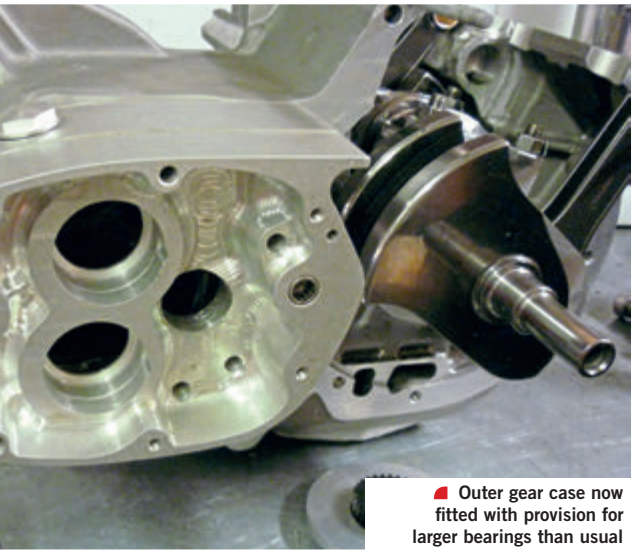




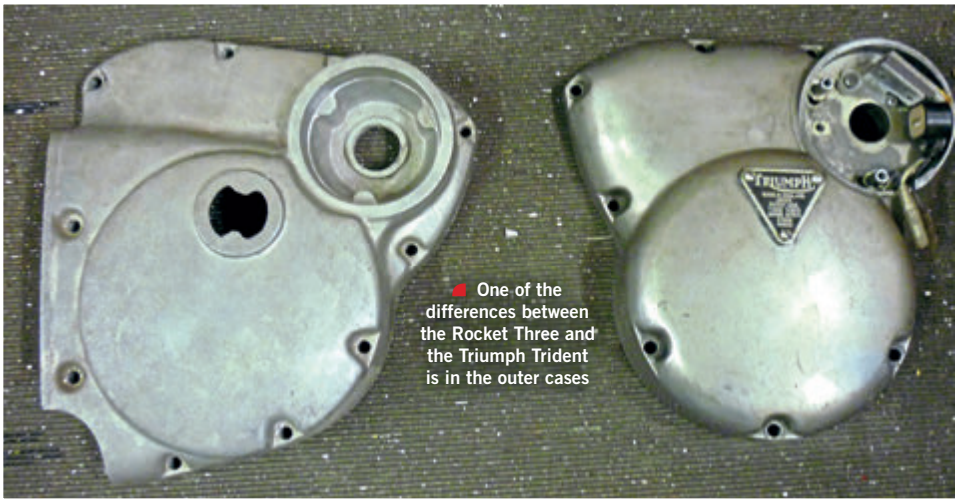
Close-up of the +.020 oversize piston and deep valve cut outs



Old style gear changer



Outer gear case now fitted with provision for larger bearings than usual

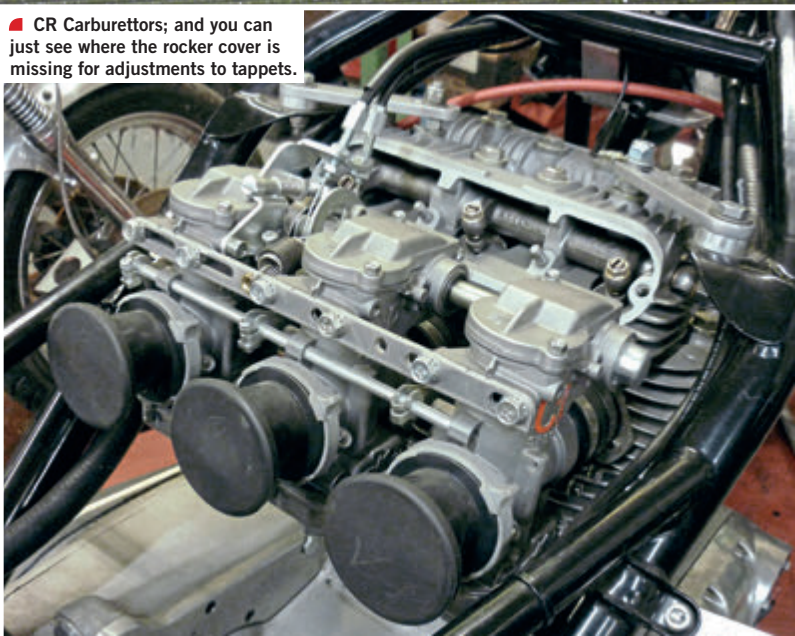


One of the differences between the Rocket Three and the Triumph Trident is in the outer cases

Just three of the Triples being made for customers



CR Carburettors; and you can just see where the rocker cover is missing for adjustments to tappets.

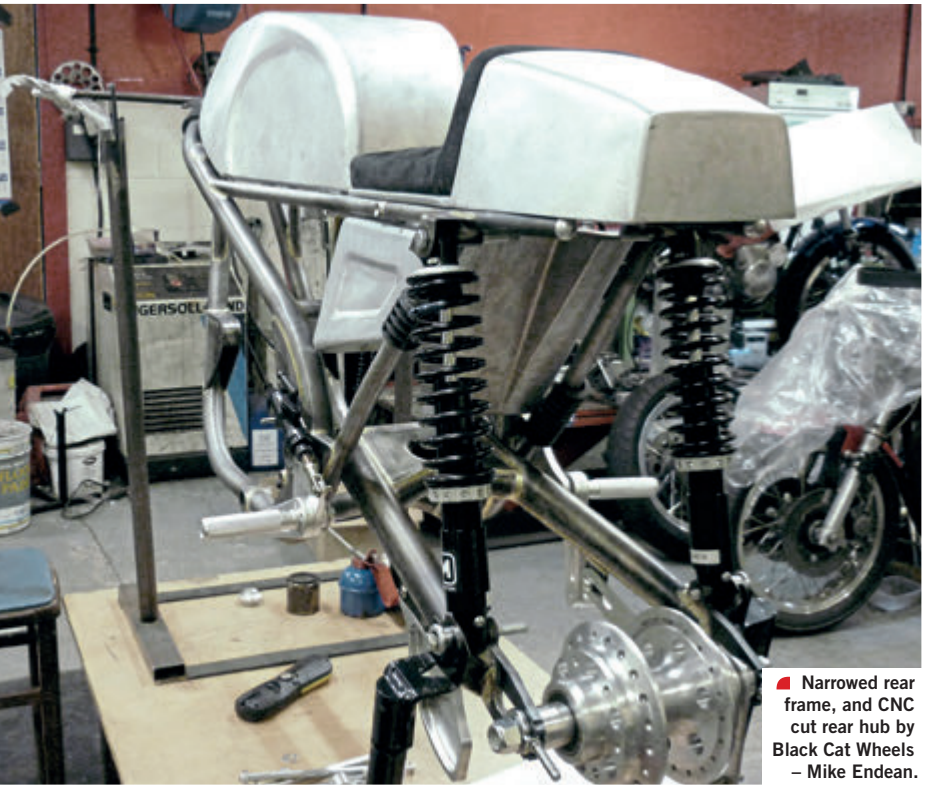




Guy's 'Rob North' frame in the construction jig



Close up of the welding to the steering head. Aircraft quality steel and nickel-bronze welding

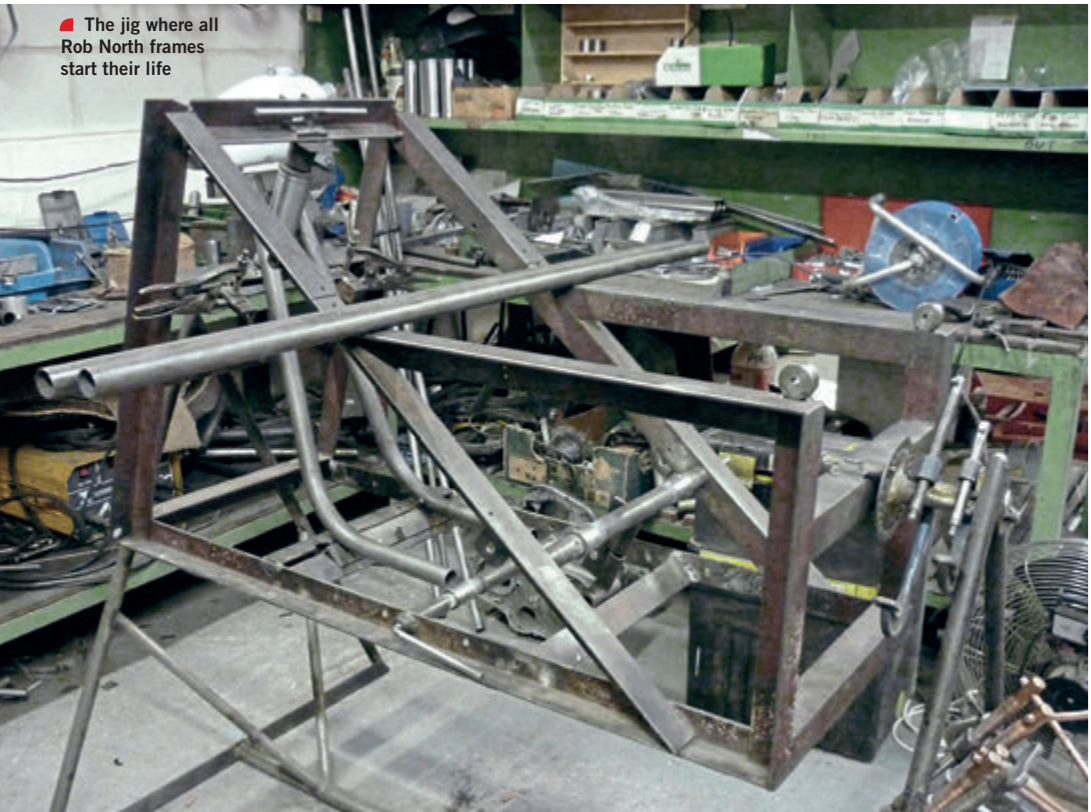


Narrowed rear frame, and CNC cut rear hub by Black Cat Wheels – Mike Endean.



Close up of welded section to the rear of the frame





The jig where all Rob North frames start their life



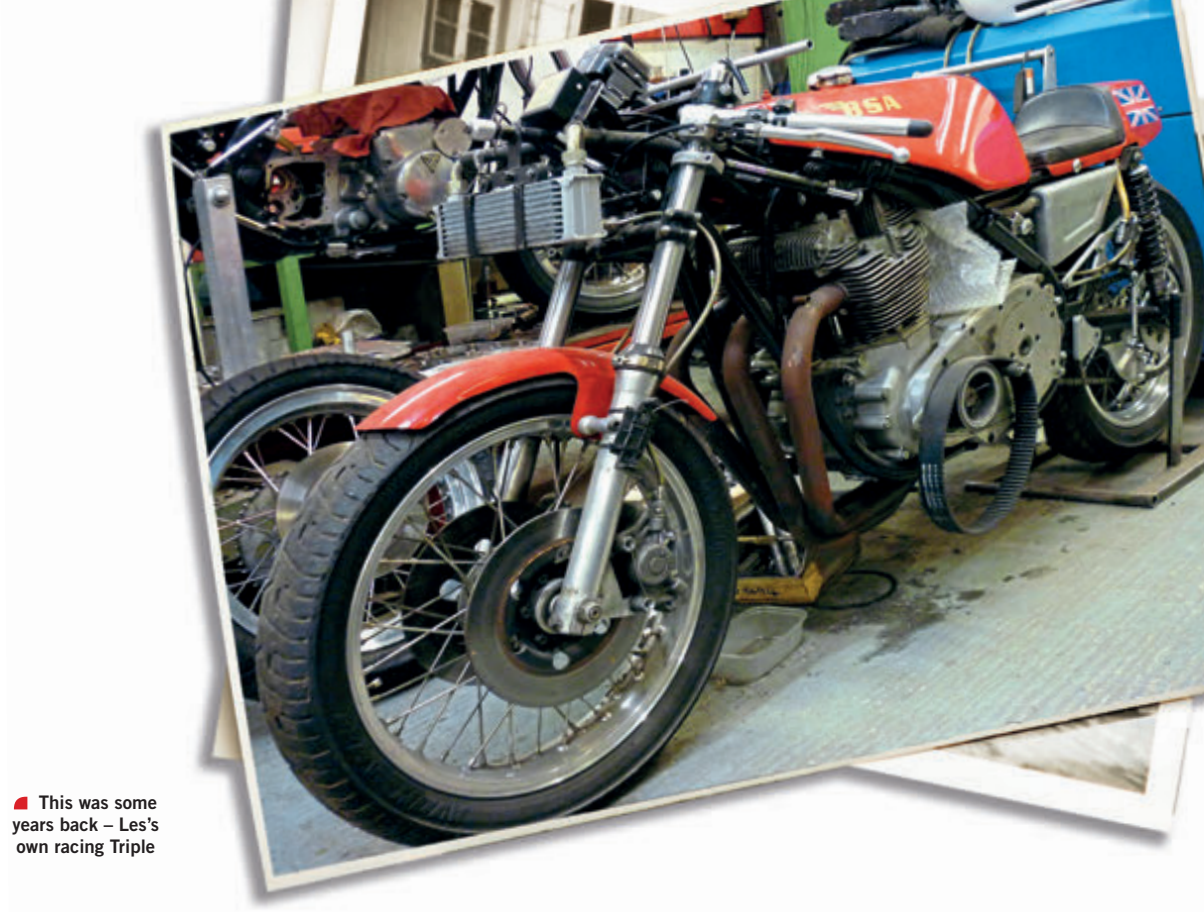
Triple trees being made from aluminium billet





Oil tank and seat detail





This was some years back – Les's own racing Triple

ever since. The atmosphere on the Isle of Man, as anyone who's gone will testify, is utterly exciting and totally addictive.

Later I had my own shop dealing with both bikes and cars in Tipton, and as the years went by I picked up a lot of engineering knowledge. I did some racing up to 1986 at circuits like Mallory Park and Snetterton, but my own lads preferred motocross and lots of engines, theirs and other competitors', got wrecked at these events. So, I started to bring them back to my workshop for repair. Later I had the opportunity to purchase the Rob North business and Mick Pearce, who used to work for the previous owner, agreed to stay with me for a couple of months to show me the ropes. He stayed 10 years. Mick's knowledge is vast, in fact before he retired (he is now 84) he had made close to 600 chassis – possibly most of them out there. This was under Miles Engineering (Norman Miles). Indeed without his help it's doubtful we would ever have got to this stage. Since that time I have pretty much specialised in the Trident and Rocket Three engines and frames and we deal with customers from all over the world.

CBG. From your workshop you not only manufacture frames, but whole engines as well?

Les. The engines for Rocket Three were getting more and more scarce, so I invested a lot of time and money in having patterns made so that new crankcases could be cast. The Black Country built its early reputation on its metalworking skills, and it's good to know one doesn't have to go to Taiwan or China to get a part made; there are still a lot of craftsmen here with the knowledge and skills for this type of work. And we build frames or complete bikes for customers around the world. For instance a man in Australia ordered a Rocket Three to race at the isle of Man TT in 2011. The following year we built a second Rocket Three that was ridden by Barry Davidson. By the last lap, the bike was in third place and excitement was running high, but sadly it developed an electrical fault and dropped out of the race. These are the highs and lows of the race business, and you have to take it all very philosophically.

CBG. It was at the Isle of Man you met Guy?

Les. We had an end garage at the event, and Guy came along saying that he wanted to ride a wall of death, but with a BSA Triple. Guy's father owned a Rocket Three, so it was inevitable he developed a fondness for these big triples which has continued to this day. Unfortunately Guy then had a serious accident (at the Ulster Grand Prix) which kept him from this challenge for about a year, but yes, we built the bike, supplying 90% of the parts. Initially Guy wanted to use the original Amal carburettors, but I urged him to use a set of Keihins. He fitted the Amals and it wasn't long before he contacted me to say that he was having trouble with getting the engine running just right. So I used a courier to quickly get the Keihins to him which solved the problem. Amal carbs certainly have their place on a standard engine, and they are the historically correct carb, but you can't beat modern technology for racing success.

CBG. You say this particular frame has been modified?

Les. The main cradle is standard Rob North, but we have narrowed the rear subframe, oil and fuel tank, so the rider's legs tuck in better and the bike is more comfortable to ride.

CBG. Talking of using technology, the engine you build is not a standard engine either is it?

Les. The Rocket Three and Trident had many interchangeable parts as you are no doubt aware, they were good designs for what they were intended.

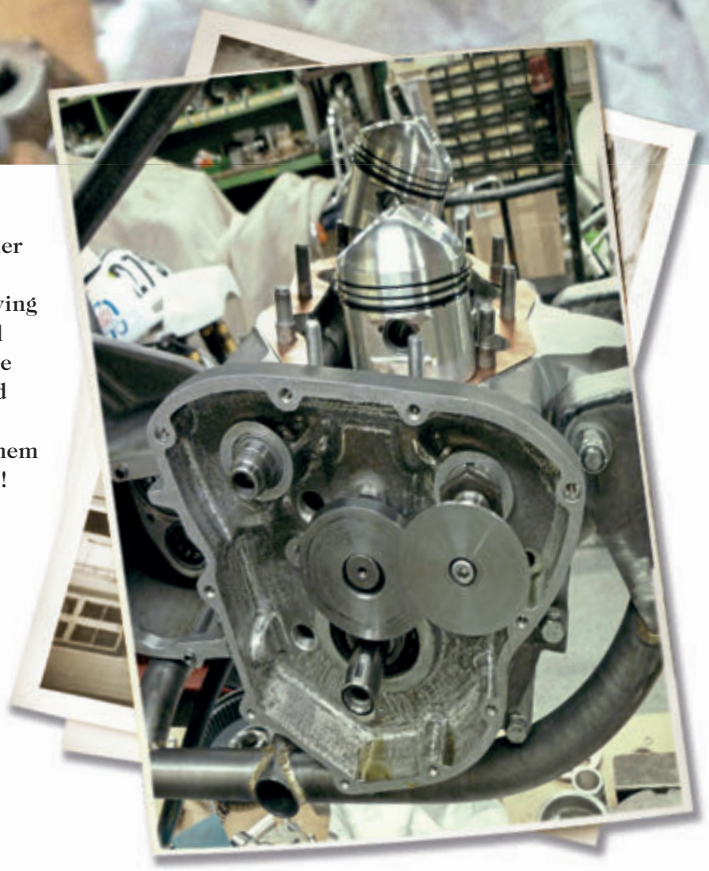
However, when you race tune them it dramatically raises the internal stresses and strains and you have to compensate for that increase in power, which now comes out at around 85bhp. For instance the gearbox we now use and you can see in the picture was designed as a cassette-type box by an engineer in New

Zealand. It has bigger bearings throughout and instead of utilising a cam plate to change the gears, we now have a drum-style changer which prevents any 'false' neutrals being selected. In a race, gear changes have to be slick and positive; select some false neutral between gears and you have lost the race.

Having said that, we make most of our gears here from steel blanks on a gear shaper. We set the machine with the right size cutter and leave it till all the teeth are cut. The gears are then sent out to have them case hardened. This process goes down to a depth of about 15 thou, any more and the teeth would most likely snap in use. It's always a compromise between strength and hardness with metals.

The crankshaft is now made from billet steel in Wolverhampton (Allens Crankshafts), con rods were designed and made by Saeng, a well known name in Formula One racing, but not so much in the world of motorcycles, while the original six-spring clutch has been replaced by a Norton-style diaphragm unit – much stronger and more reliable. The barrels and high compression pistons are from Omega pistons in Halesowen, supplied by Fred Hadley. Then of course the whole lot – crank, pistons, con rods, etc – have to be dynamically balanced, this time by Trevor Wilkinson. CBG

Guy became a father recently, with his partner Sharon giving birth to a baby girl on October 23. The couple have named her Dottie 'Dot' Martin. We wish them all the best of luck!



Top: Freshly engineered ignition backing plate with fitted bearing

Right: Pistons from Omega in Halesowen, and the timing chest, from where the inlet and exhaust cams are driven. Electronic ignition is driven by the disc top right

NEXT MONTH

Does Guy Martin's Bike actually get finished? Is there anything of the traditional Rocket Three in there, and will it be ready in time for the next TT Classics?

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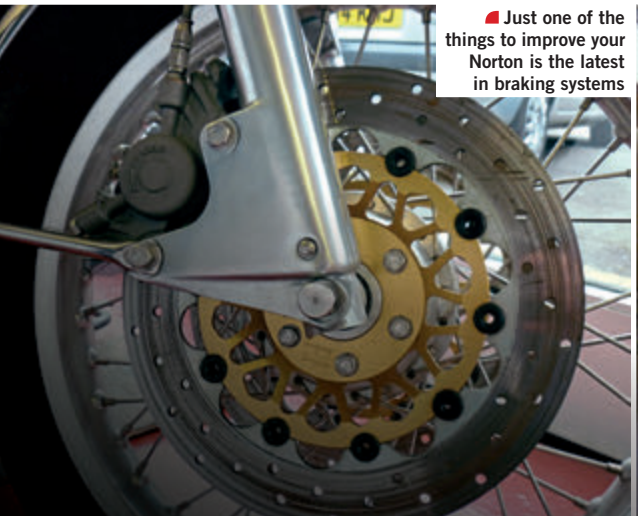
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Always best policy to put your finest wares in the shop window... built by Les himself



Kate and Les Emery at the shop front – where else?



Just one of the things to improve your Norton is the latest in braking systems







Assortment of centre stands. From top – late Commando; made by Velocette in Meriden – along with many other parts. Late Featherbed and Featherbed stands made by Pete Lovell Developments

NORVIL MOTORCYCLE COMPANY

It's a family affair

For more than 37 years, Norvil has been helping to keep Norton owners doing what they love – riding. So we have a look around.

WORDS AND PICS BY ROB DAVIES – WITH MUCH ASSISTANCE FROM KATE EMERY

I know a little about Norton motorcycles but not enough. So whenever I meet experts, I keep my ears open and my mouth firmly shut. What can you do when you want to repair, restore or improve your old Norton? Maybe make it a better bike than ever before... or just get some spares; well that's exactly what Norvil in Burntwood, Staffordshire does.

Burntwood is one of those out of the way places – even for midland folks. But at Corner Garage, near Chasetown, Cannock, you can get pretty much whatever you need for whatever model you have. And as Sly and the Family Stone sang back in the 1970s, Norvil is a family affair.

The company was started by Les Emery, now 68, and his wife Sue, and they are now also assisted by their daughter Kate, as well as up to another eight or so either family members or close associates. They are a well oiled team... as I quickly discovered when I rode over on my Honda (sorry folks) on a windy but dry October afternoon.

I was greeted by Kate Emery, who with her smiling eyes and happy disposition has developed a love for Norton, and was only too keen to show me around. And what they don't stock, isn't worth having. Like Alice in Wonderland following the rabbit down a burrow, I was led around a warren of well stocked corridors, in and out of rooms and sheds, to discover the Norton owners' equivalent of the 'sweetie shop', so stocked it is with motorcycle goodies. And yes, there is still a shop front. We went there first, but today most of their business is conducted online and customers are advised to book an appointment if they really want to get seen properly.







The beginnings of the business are quite humble, as back in 1968 Sue bought Les a Norton Dominator for £40... and today they hold a license from Norton to produce and market the world's largest stock of genuine spares, complete kits, and even complete bikes... but more of that later.

Les joined the Norton Owners' Club some years back with the hope of assistance in getting spares, but soon discovered that these spares were either hard or indeed impossible to get hold of.

So he set about getting parts made, and Les is proud of the fact that even today most of the parts they provide are locally sourced, thanks to the rich industrial past of that area of the country.

They started out in 1980 with a small shop in nearby Rugeley, but after purchasing the engineering drawings and the Norvil trademark in 1982, the business expanded quickly and required larger premises; so they moved to The Corner Garage in 1987.

Today they hold more than 11,500 new parts in stock, and have generally around 700 refurbished parts on sale on eBay, which Kate's husband Mike looks after... as well as other jobs in the workshop. Indeed most of the folks at Norvil wear more than one cap. With local, national and international customers all seeking bits for their bikes and 90 dealers worldwide, the business requires almost £1 million worth of stock – that's cost price – to just keep ticking over.

Most importantly, with modern CNC machining and other advances in technology and closer tolerances, many Norton parts and kits are better quality than their original counterparts; just consider the upgrade to brakes and engines for instance.

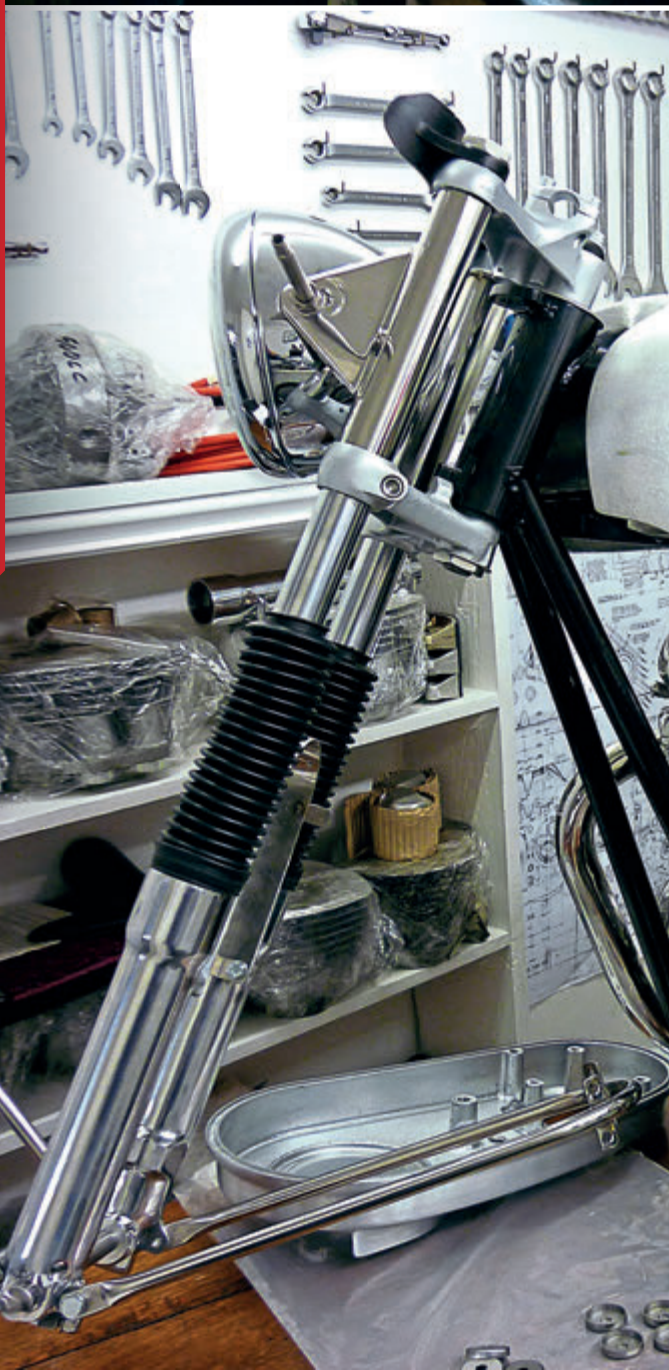
"Take these crankcases," says Les. "They are stronger than the originals, and it's the same for cylinder heads and barrels." This compulsion, passion, call it what you will, means that Norvil can produce anything that Norton owners might require.

"I don't think there is anything we can't supply for the big twins. And when I'm not answering technical questions, I actually get to build new bikes – or restore a bike, like the Dominator in the workshop at the present," he adds.



Marie in Despatch – a most important job





Stock bins stuffed full of mostly Navigator, Jubilee, Dollshead and upright gearbox kit that no one else makes. It's the Norton owners' equivalent of the sweetie shop. Just two of hundreds of boxes of Norton goodies



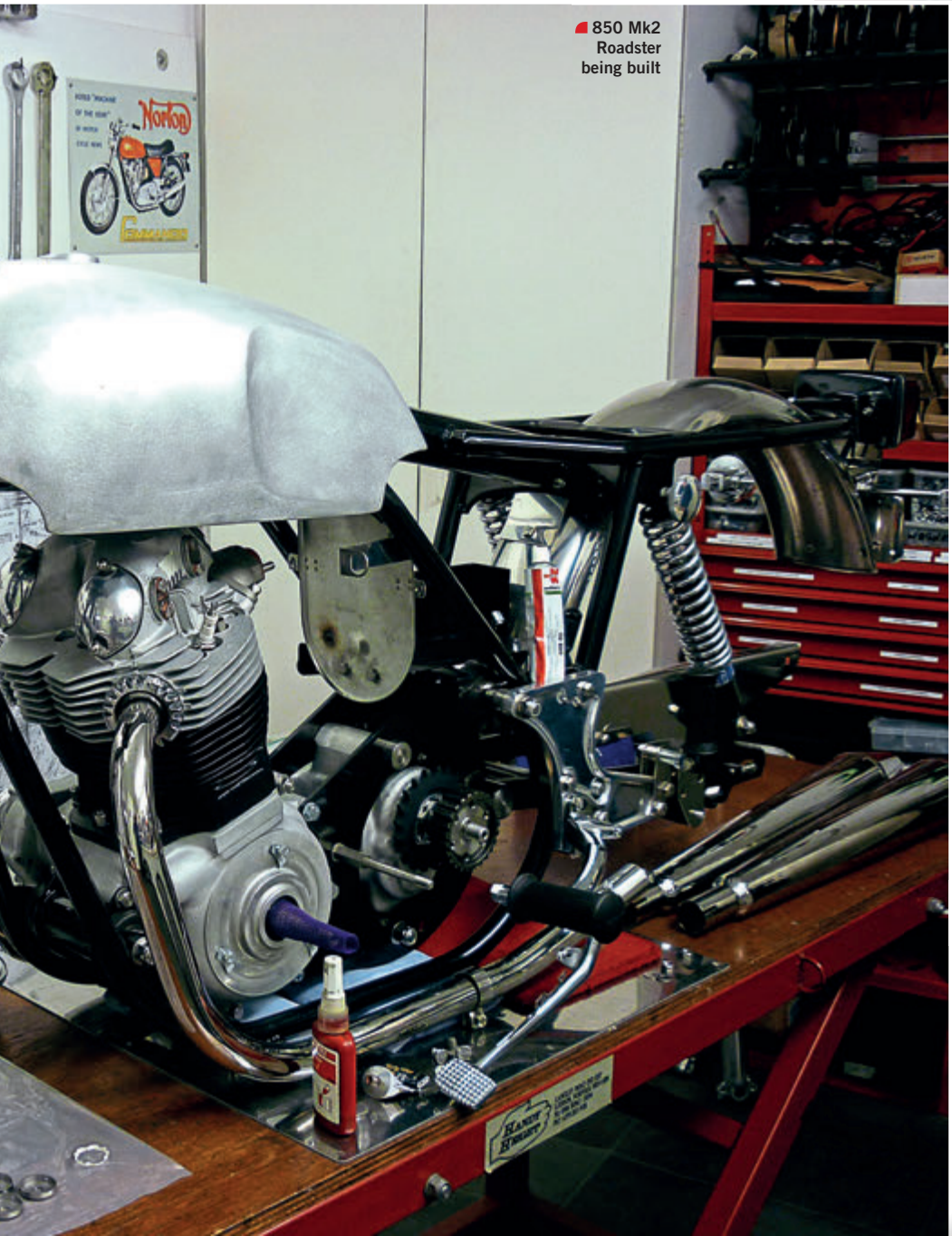




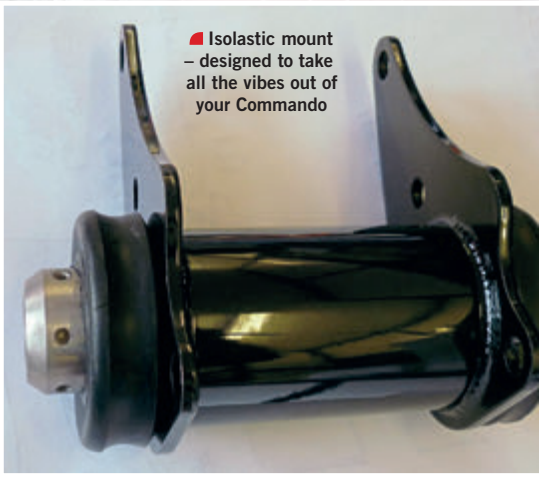
Various quality glass fibre accessories – all made locally. From left – black and yellow production front guards. part Nos 065838Y and 063706B (for black – get it?). White Norvil production Commando fairing; red side panel; and green fastback, all by Lucas Mitchenall. Rear mudguard for either Commando or Dominator



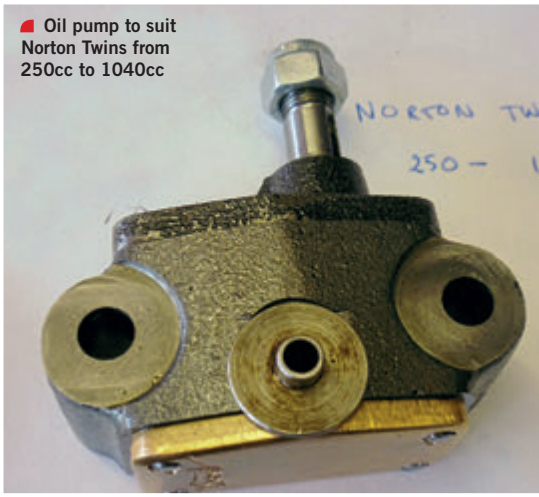
Display cases of Norton essentials – far too tempting



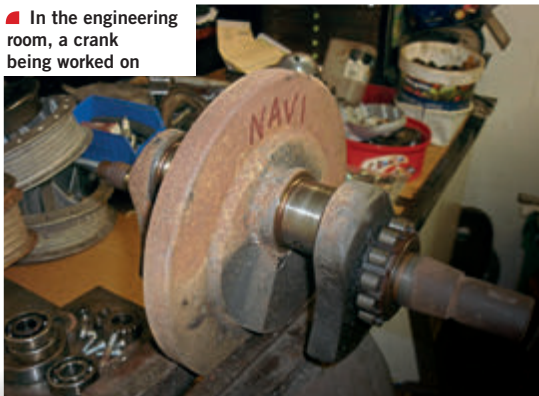
850 Mk2 Roadster being built



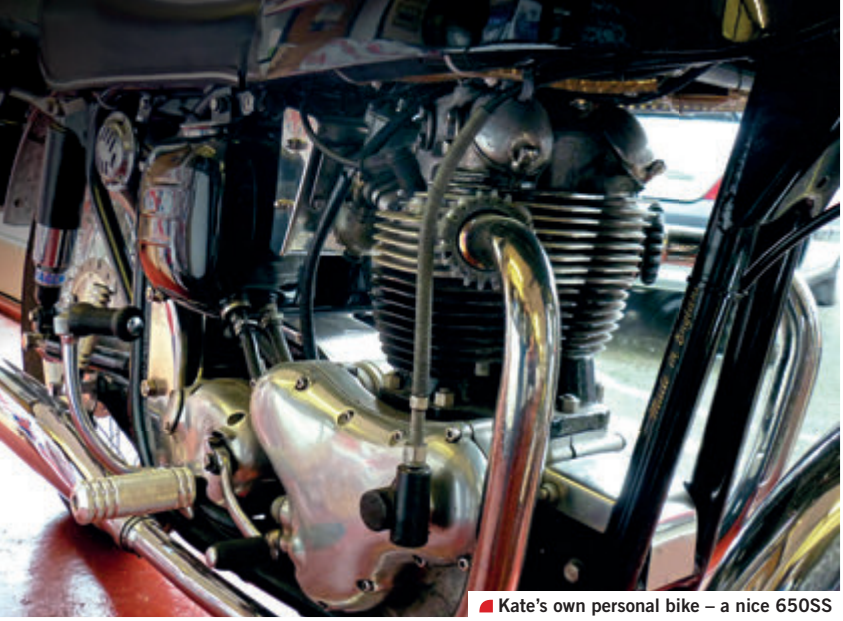
Isolastic mount – designed to take all the vibes out of your Commando



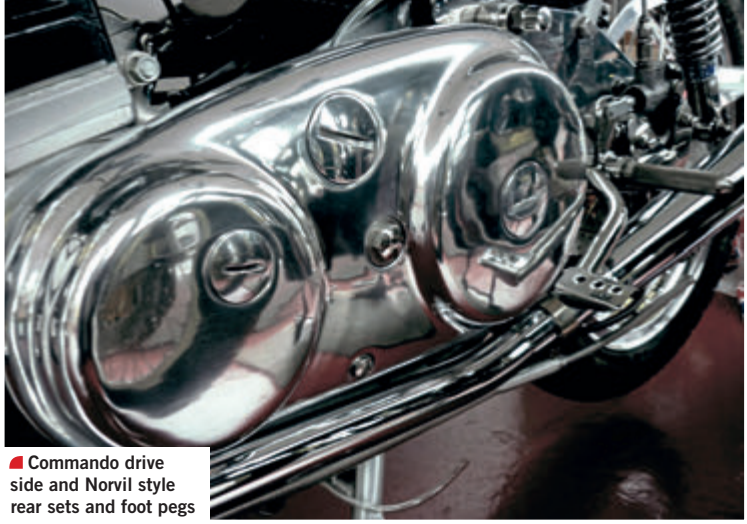
Oil pump to suit Norton Twins from 250cc to 1040cc



In the engineering room, a crank being worked on



Kate's own personal bike – a nice 650SS



Commando drive side and Norvil style rear sets and foot pegs









Alan Clarke's Dominator 99 being built in the 'build' room. Original frame and engine casing; gearbox outer. All other metal work made locally



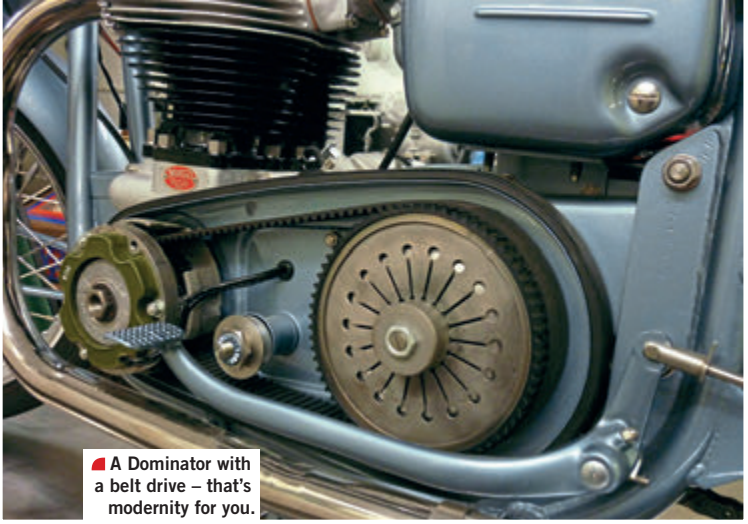
Roland, who looks after the invoices, makes me a nice cup of tea before Kate and I head off on a tour of the Norvil empire. After a quick look round at the main office where Sue and Gareth are dealing with internet orders, we pass by Jan – doing more computer stuff – to admire a shiny Commando 850, and I get a picture of Kate's very nice 650SS.

I start to take pictures of some of the many spares – side stands, oil pumps, centre stands and glass fibre parts – all made locally, before looking in at the workshop where a gorgeous glossy pale blue Dominator is being lovingly put together. Apparently the frame, engine and gearbox cases are original, but everything else has been made locally... did we already mention this?

In the 1950s Norton was perhaps best known for two things... its powerful engines – backed up by racing success, and the legendary frame 'the Featherbed' by which all later frames were judged for their handling, either good or bad.

In the late 1940s, after the success of Edward Turner's Speed Twin, most manufacturers also wanted a half decent twin. In 1947, Bert Hopwood designed (well, sort of copied) the BSA A10. This went into production as the Dominator. In 1960 a revised Featherbed was made – the 'Slimline' – and in 1961 they fitted the 650SS. Ridden by a good rider, this pairing was unbeatable, having a top speed of over 110mph. Unfortunately for us Brits, it was for export only... ah well, as they say, patience is a virtue.

In the workshop Les quickly set me to work – I know, a rare sight. He has a small device with a



A Dominator with a belt drive – that's modernity for you.



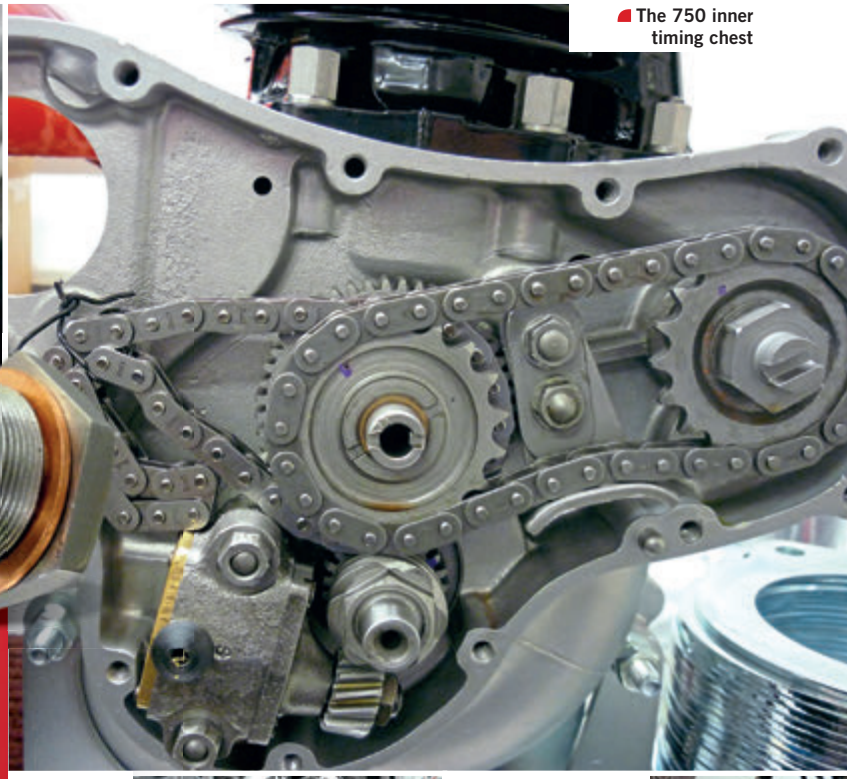
The engine 'clean' room. From left – two 850 Mk3s; an 850 Mk2; a 750 and finally nearest is another 850





My filter thingy efforts!

Right: The finished filter assembly installed in an Oil change assembly with magnetic sump plug. Part 067221A. £19.50



The 750 inner timing chest

couple of cogs. I placed a strip of gauze in this contraption, turned a handle, and out came a nice little oil filter. I'm quite proud of my engineering skills!

In an adjoining room were rows of wheel hubs, cylinder heads and crankcases, all waiting for Marie in despatch. In the 'clean' room is a shiny row of various Commando engines in differing states of finish – cue more pictures. But it's not just the ever popular twins that Norvil concentrates on.

THE SINGLES

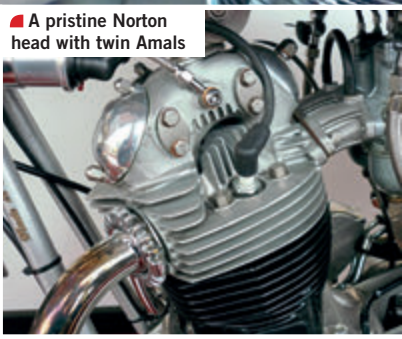
Norvil doesn't currently cater for the Inter or Max engine parts, but who knows what the future holds? Nevertheless, a large percentage of the spares made by Norvil are for the softly tuned singles, and it was the Norton Owners' Club (NOC) that pointed Les in the right direction, for the company built many more singles than it ever did twins.

There were around 80,000 Commandos produced, but around 100,000 16Hs during the Second World War alone. Norvil commenced by having made a batch of valve lifter spindles and cam followers. The number of parts quickly grew from that initial start. When you start to add on the various side-valve, OHV and ES models, there are plenty of singles out there to cater for, and they are fine bikes not only to collect but to ride, and their owners love them.

The overhead cam models such as the 490 CSI and International are popular, but the racing bikes such as the 30M and 40M Manx, made in dohc form, are rarer and more expensive beasts. The 348cc Model 50S and 490 cc ES2 are also collectable.



Rear sets... in close up



A pristine Norton head with twin Amals



More racks of bits destined for projects or eBay.

AND SO TO THE FUTURE

Sorry, I don't have a crystal ball, but I do know that Kate and her husband are planning to take over more of the business as Sue and Les get older and maybe a tad more grumpier (Les that is).

More recently, Les has turned his attention to the Matchless brand. In fact he has recently purchased the drawings for the Matchless G15, P11 and P11A from Andrews Engineering, and I was honoured to be able to see the two bikes he is presently working on.

Norvil the family business is indeed big business, and both modern and vintage Nortons, and now maybe Matchless owners, couldn't do without this team in what i earlier called a midlands backwater.

My grateful thanks to Kate Emery for her hospitality and kindness. CBG



Les's latest Matchless project





From left, and behind the scenes, are Roland, Sue and Gareth

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HOW TO

Clean your CV carbs

Classic bikes often suffer from standing for long periods without being used, which can spell horrors for the fuel system. Rusty tanks, eroding fuel lines and worn carbs can all cause problems too. So we're going to have a quick look at checking and cleaning a carburettor and fuel tap. Our carb is a CV type commonly found on 1970s Japanese bikes, but most of the principles are the same for earlier style carbs.



FUEL TAP

This is an extreme example. You can see the rust from the tank has filled the top and also on this Honda tap, the gauze to the reserve exit has broken off. But it may be okay as you can get replacement rubber parts, so it needs cleaning to find what we're dealing with.



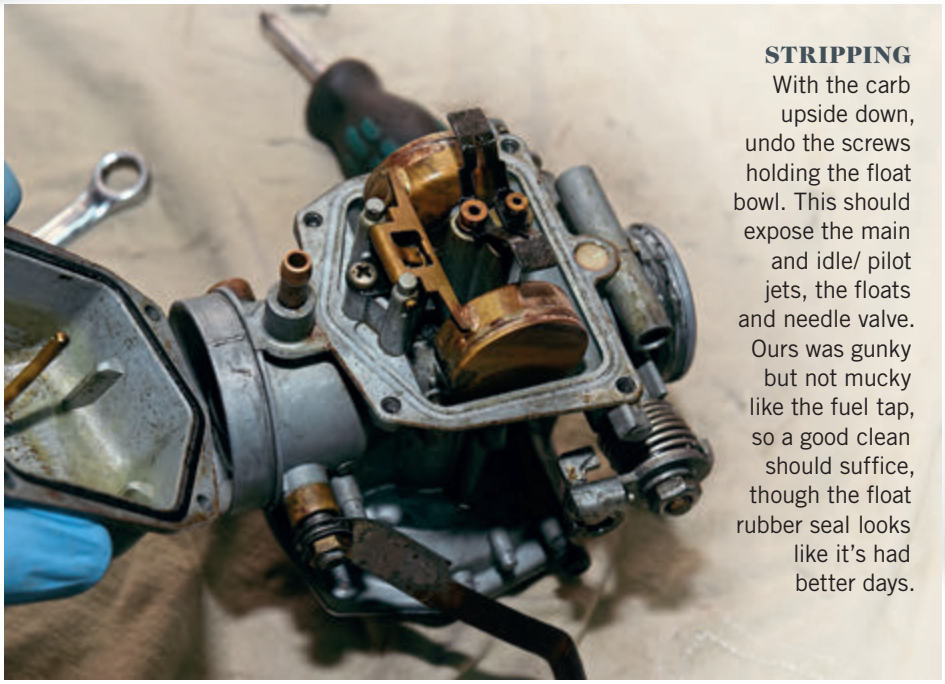
CLEANING

Strip the tap to as many parts as you can and clean in a carb cleaning solution. There should be gauzes, rubber O rings and possibly some washers, so keep an eye out for these. Use penetrating spray for stubborn fixings yet try to be gentle – most are soft alloy and the smallest scrape from a screwdriver could lead to leaks.



IF THAT DOESN'T WORK

If carb cleaner doesn't work, try using boiling water in a saucepan – it's surprising how well this works. We haven't used it here, but boiling the parts in lemon juice works the best. Its acidic content loosens crud left behind from dirty tanks or ethanol, but make sure you clean the parts thoroughly in hot water as soon as you remove them from the lemon juice and use an air-line to dry them off.



STRIPPING

With the carb upside down, undo the screws holding the float bowl. This should expose the main and idle/ pilot jets, the floats and needle valve. Ours was gunky but not mucky like the fuel tap, so a good clean should suffice, though the float rubber seal looks like it's had better days.



FLOAT JET

Our float jet was sticking as the floats moved up and down. Closer inspection revealed slight wear, so a new jet is needed and the sleeve it slides in cleaned. At this point you can also remove the jets for cleaning, but be really careful – they are sometimes screwed in, sometimes compression fitted and being made of brass, will easily be damaged by screwdrivers or pliers if not careful.

THE CARBURETTOR

Empty the carb float bowl of petrol. Then use carb cleaner or brake cleaner with a toothbrush to clean the outside as much as possible, to stop any dirt getting back in once you strip it. Check the butterflies are all moving smoothly and from inside move the slide up – it should come down nice and smoothly. If not, your diaphragm could be damaged.



DIAPHRAGM

This is the part at the top of the carb that controls the slide that holds the needle. The rubber diaphragm is extremely delicate, especially in this 1971 carburettor. Gently remove it so you can look for tears and inspect the slide and needle, looking for minute wear on the pointy end of the needle especially. Clean the slot the diaphragm sits in to maintain its efficiency.





CLEANING JETS
With the slide removed it's easier to see through them with a light behind. The pilot jet is tiny, but you should be able to see how bad they are. Try using an air-line to clean them, but it's most probable if dirty that you'll need to try the boiling water method, or even a thin piece of wire – though smooth the end with emery paper to remove sharp burrs.



FLOAT

Before you start putting it all back together nice and clean, check the float. Older carbs used brass or tin floats which over time let petrol in, meaning they don't – er – float. Shaking mine I could hear petrol in one side, so I can buy a new one for £10, or dry it out and try resoldering it.



FITTING
Refit the cables, choke and then the fun begins – getting the carb back into the ageing rubber manifolds. If you can, save time and fingernails by buying new ones – £20 each for our Honda. But if not available, try WD-40 or a heat gun, but good luck…

HOW DOES A CV CARB WORK?

A CV carb uses similar principles to an earlier-style carb like an Amal. The float chamber fills from the tank until the float raises to a point and closes off, like your toilet cistern, to make sure there is always enough fuel available. The choke opens a flow of fuel from the float, allowing a richer mixture for cold start. Then, on idle, the vacuum from the engine sucks through the idle jet, with the air controlled by the butterfly valve controlled by the throttle cable, which is closed on idle. As the throttle is twisted the butterfly opens, airflow through the bore increases and at a certain point, the vacuum starts to pull the slide out, which lifts the needle in the main jet.





PUTTING IT ALL BACK TOGETHER

Take your time and make sure everything is clean – spotlessly clean. Start at the bottom and set the float bowl up with the owners' manual so it doesn't starve or flood and make sure the float jet works freely. Reinsert the jets if you've taken them out and replace the float bowl. Remember, you don't need to tighten everything too much – it's brass and alloy and small, so take care.

With the top, make sure the needle is in the correct place (some have a circlip to allow the needle to be raised or lowered) and when back in, make sure it moves freely. Reseat the diaphragm with great care and if you struggle, use a little rubber grease to help it stick, finally replace the top.

Ultrasonic cleaners

The latest trend for cleaning items such as carbs is using an ultrasonic cleaner. These use high frequency ultrasonic sound waves in fluid to agitate dirt and contaminants from the parts. Small ones capable of taking a single carb can be bought for around £60, but if you're trying to clean two, three or even four carbs, you'll need an industrial-sized model, costing hundreds. If you're restoring a whole engine they could be worth it, but if you only think you'll use one occasionally, maybe borrow one or buy one between several club members or friends.



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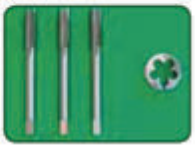
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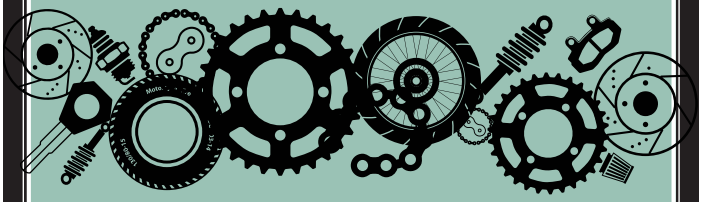
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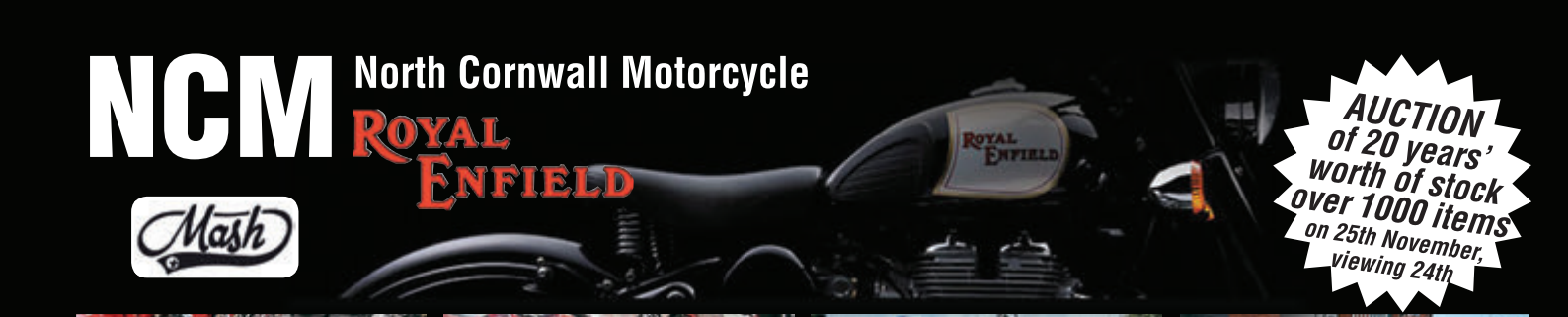
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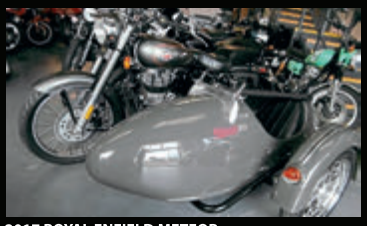
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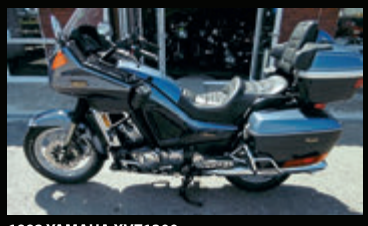
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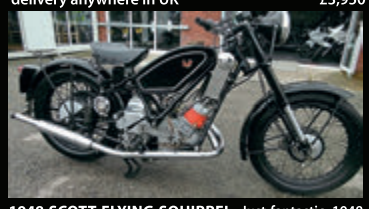


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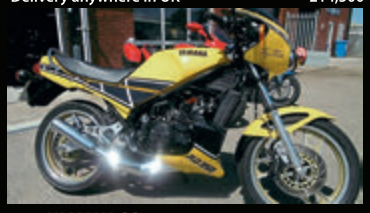


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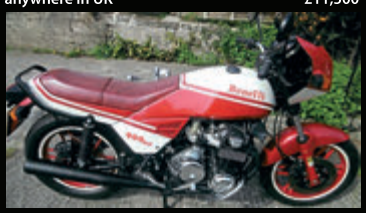


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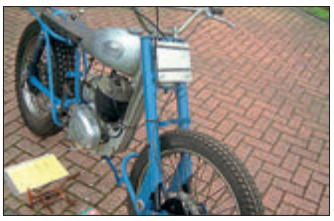
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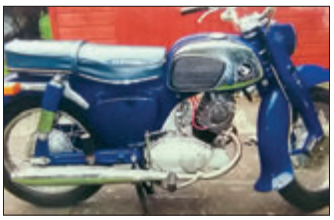
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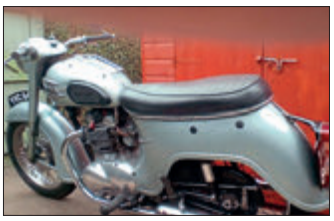
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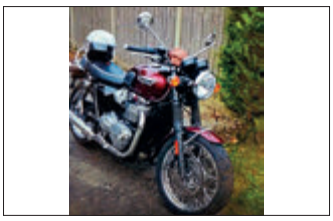
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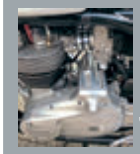
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BMW R80 one owner 30 years, service history, genuine 18,000 miles, toolkit, handbook, luggage, all original recent service, new tyres, 1985, superb, £3750. Tel. Martin 07773 057498. Glos.

BSA A10 above average condition, runs very well, black & chrome with Siamese exhaust, Gold Star pipe, full years MoT, can deliver locally, £7000. Tel. 07827 798969. Essex.

BSA BANTAM Trials motorcycle, 1964, 175cc, rebore and new piston by Villers, good engine, excellent condition for year, some spares, no V5, £1650. Tel. 02144 535413. Flintshire.

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MOTO GUZZI Le Mans II, needs tlc, bored out to 950cc, sprayed by Dream Machine £3500. Tel. 07710 949799. Wirral.

MV AGUSTA 125 1952, MoT exempt, concours condition, V5 registered, £5100. Tel. 07774 253129. Surrey.

NORTON 650SS 1963, very little restoration, quite original and clean bike, exception to standard, Avons, concentric carbs, BTH mag, sound engine, with good rims, pipes and silencers, chrome guards, chain case, £6650. Tel. Harry 01458 850136. Somerset.

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SUZUKI TS185 1973, good engine with new chain and rear tyre, excellent condition for year, no paperwork or V5 £1650. Tel. 01244 535413. Flintshire.

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TRIUMPH THUNDERBIRD 1981, 650cc, very good condition, 24,000 miles, lots of new parts, £3250. Tel. 07879 772788. Lancs.

TRIUMPH TIGER CUB 1956/57 project matching numbers, lots of new parts, £1100. Tel. 07544 397724. Cheshire.

YAMAHA XJ600 motorcycle a future classic, this machine as been checked front to back all necessary lubrication has been carried out, oil and filter change, new air filter, new battery, new clutch cable and lever, seat recovered, tyres are all good, first to see will buy, £1095. Tel. 07971 651258. Mid Glamorgan.

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G9 CRANKCASES 1955, very good, £75. B25 crank assembly, new alloy rod fitted, £150. Two C15 engine units one complete, other part complete. Tel. 01262 488672. East Yorkshire.

HONDA CB750 SOHC kickstart, 1969 onwards, £25. Tel. 07979 949654. Cheshire.

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YAMAHA YDS3 complete seat or base only required, 1964-65. Tel. 01384 371386. West Midlands.

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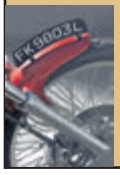
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Frank Westworth

Famous Last Words

The calm sound of silence

THERE ARE TIMES when saying nothing can be considerably difficult. Times when saying something is the only obvious course, but is also a road best avoided. Too few folk understand this, which is why there are shouting, running, cursing and wars.

Picture this. Standing in a pal's homely garage and alleged workshop, seriously bored with the conversation he was sharing with someone else, someone plainly more interesting than me although they were revisiting the endless 'I'd rather ride worms than eat a Harley' thing, my weary gaze drooped onto the nearest of his bikes. A Brit. Not a model I'm particularly familiar with, although presumably worth something, even if only because it was built in Yorkshire and named after a cat. Curious.

For sins I cannot now remember, I wasted several chunks of my long, long life staggering around bike shows pretending to know what I was looking at in a motorcycle sense and piously pronouncing upon their worthiness – or otherwise – of a prize. This was an educational process, produced both backache and a squint and produced both false friends and irrational enemies. I stopped doing it. However, I also developed a keen observer's eye for detail flaws – even the dullest of bikes can feature entertaining horrors if examined closely, like rounded-off fasteners. The Yorkist singular motorcycle near to me was host to a lot of very bodged nuts and bolts.

Closer examination revealed that almost all the hex heads were in a state of serious weariness. Even the big ones, like the nuts on the wheel spindles, which are generally immune to even the most dedicated hacker. While my chums got on with their pointless repetitive debate, I sauntered, casual-like, over to a nearby Japanese machine, itself a victim – to my certain knowledge – of a rebuild by my pussy-loving pal. Its nuts and bolts were pristine. All of them. Not just the ones easily visible. A mystery. No murders on that oriental express, plainly. But why?

I felt bad about this – okay, I'm just pretending to be pleasant here, bear with me – and interrupted their gripping griping, remarking gently, cautiously, smilingly upon the mystery of the savaged nuts. They shut up and stared. I shuffled my feet. Maybe I whistled a cheery tune, memory is blank here. After what felt like a minor ice age, my previous pal and evident cat lover quite suddenly acknowledged the arrival of comprehension and said something like: 'Tools.' There you go. From the mouths of babes and innocents there comes forth wisdom.

Investigation revealed that although that neat, tidy and well populated in a motorcycle sense garage contained a fine array of Snap-On tools and even a handsome and very shiny Snap-On tool chest to keep them in, all those tools were metric. Metric spanners do not fit imperial nuts. I mentioned this. My bafflement may have shown. It appeared that having decided to embark upon a nut'n'bolt restoration of the long-suffering long-stroke Yorkshire terror, my pal and his pal (pals always have another pal – a fellow sufferer – to share the blame – have you noticed this?) had decided that he would see whether he enjoyed the build before wasting money on tools with which to accomplish that build. An interesting approach.

Of course I enquired how the job had gone? How had he enjoyed working on a mighty, heritage-packed piece of imperial industrial history such as this?

He'd hated the entire exercise. Nothing would fit, nothing would work and the thing was way gutless for a 650 – he could not see why anyone bothered. And oil wept from every joint and it blew gaskets. Hateful. This was why Honda rules the world. Things like that. Endlessly. I may have dozed off for a while. I offered to lend him my second-best set of imperial spanners, maybe my Whitworth lump hammer as well, just to be encouraging. This produced only scorn.

'British bikes!' he exclaimed. 'They're just rubbish. Impossible to work on. Rubbish.' Followed by a wave of self-congratulation, self-complimentary asides and an increasing secondary wave of abuse targeted at … me!

Sometimes keeping quiet is the better option. I must try to remember that. I shall repeat after me… CBG

'Investigation revealed that although that neat, tidy and well populated in a motorcycle sense garage contained a fine array of Snap-On tools and even a handsome and very shiny Snap-On tool chest to keep them in, all those tools were metric. Metric spanners do not fit imperial nuts. I mentioned this'

Who is Frank Westworth?

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

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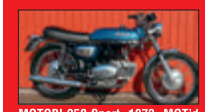

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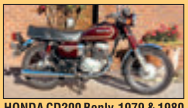

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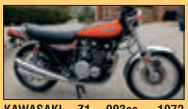

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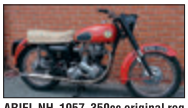

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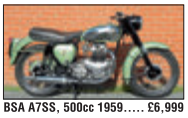

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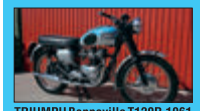

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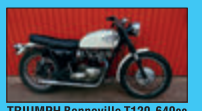

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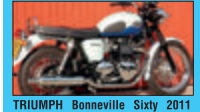

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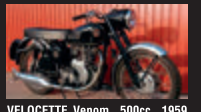
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