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British bike guide

This time it's Norton

Part 3

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AUGUST 2020

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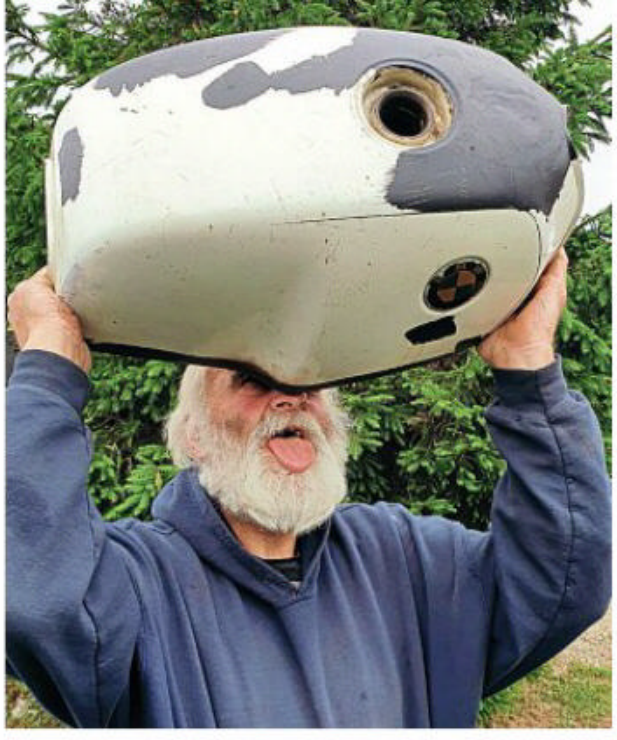
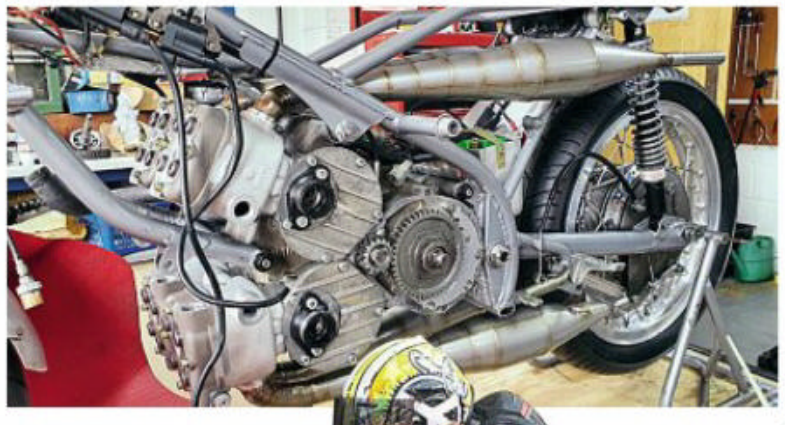
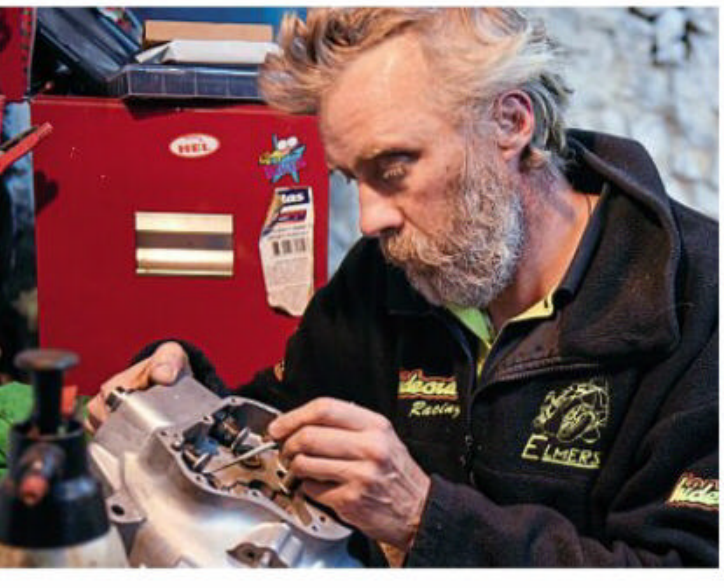
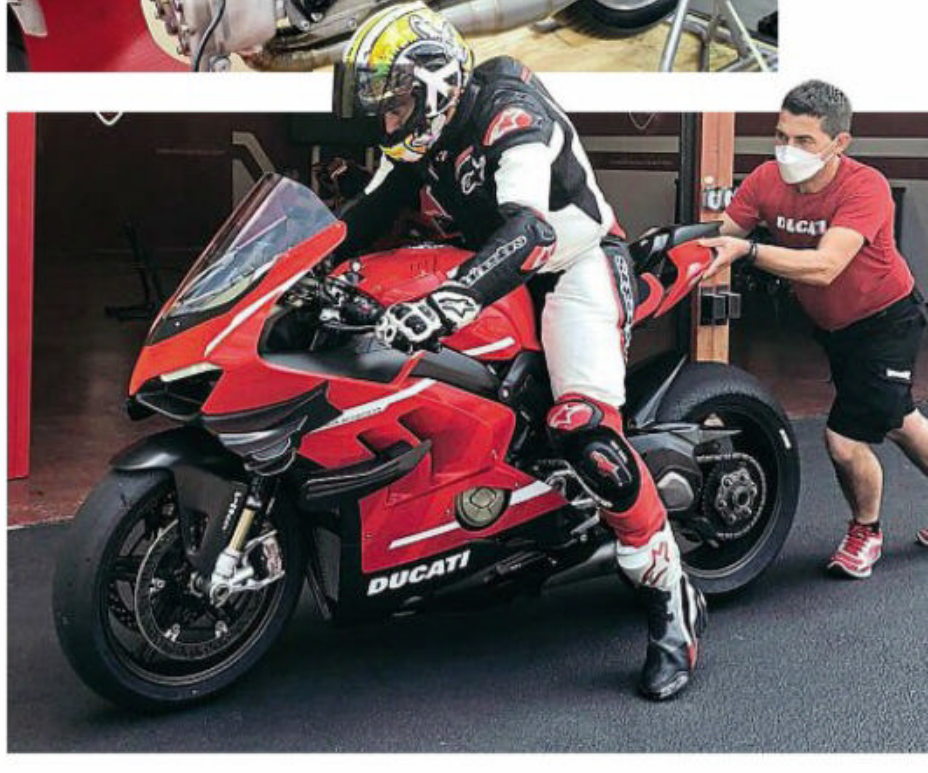








Greetings to you, one and all!

From all at *Classic Bike Guide*, we hope you are all keeping as well as can be expected, and still smiling. Despite the world trying its best, we're still going, and when fixing, building, cleaning, writing about or riding a bike, the situation that affects us all seems so very far away. I truly hope all our readers haven't suffered and are adapting to this new environment.

Everything we know has been affected this year. Speaking to James Hewing of the National Motorcycle Museum earlier, he revealed how they are starting a campaign to help the museum survive, as it is heavily dependent on its sister businesses, which are in the hard-hit hospitality industry. Read more about it on how you can help on page 20.

While some outside shows are promising to be held, most are falling foul of being able to open safely, while also trying to guess the appetite for people to come back out, after being filled with fear to stay in. No one has the right answer (though many claim to!) so I just hope common sense and respect for fellow people prevails.

It's also interesting to see how the world is starting to open up. My friend, Chad, went to Italy recently to test the brand-new, £75,000 Ducati Superleggera V4 – a surefire future classic, as well as the lightest, most powerful and most expensive new bike out there, and said how it was an odd experience with all wearing masks and gloves; but the bike, around Mugello, was worth it. I'm very jealous, Chad!

Personally, I'm utilising the time I would often spend at shows and events in the workshop. My Opel car projects I've had since a kid are coming on with the engine going back together. The Norton was moving slowly but steadily until I was an idiot and rushed it, and the new BMW is great to ride out, despite looking somewhat odd and still utilising a tank I've borrowed from Neville's hoard.

It's strange trying to get 1980s injectors sorted one evening, while rebuilding a 1950s engine (and 1930s design) the next and trying to remember the 1980s tourer (a 1970s design) is still a classic and not to be thrashed!

Speaking of the BMW has led me to a question that may have several answers; what is a classic bike? Is there a cut off, like the VMCC has – 25 years old? Sounds reasonable, or is it as simple as personal taste? Is it looks? Just because a life-long rider who has always worked on his own bikes finds a lighter bike with electric start easier and safer now, does that make them less of a rider than a weekend warrior on a Triton that he had someone build for him? Why do we judge folks on what they ride?

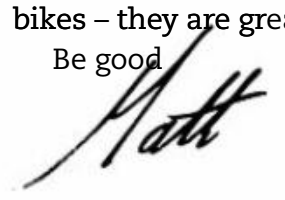
My good friend, James, has a Honda Deauville to ride most days, but only to save his collection of incredible vintage bikes. John, on page 38, has been riding his BSA M33 since he was a boy – they've been together forever! It's no concours winner, and isn't even rare – but with such a wonderful connection, such memories, the M33 will always be a classic. It's a lovely story, and makes me wish I'd kept some of my earlier bikes.

Another treat I had this month was to see two-stroke genius, James, and his Jawa racebike. The way a poor, Eastern Bloc company made a competitive machine is great (apart from the tragic loss of Bill Ivy), but seeing at what lengths you have to go to keep these things going and reliable is a real labour of love, especially when the guys take it to the Czech Republic to race regularly. I could look at that V4, 350cc, two-stroke engine for hours – like James does!

So it seems that this pandemic may have kept many at home, but that has got a lot of projects moving. And my answer to what makes a classic? That, is purely down to you, whether you like it or not – not what others think. Dirty and unrestored or concours, ridden daily or tucked in the garden room, kick-start or press a button; it's how it makes you feel.

Thanks for the many emails, and keep sending in your stories and photos of your bikes – they are great to see.

Be good



Matt Hull
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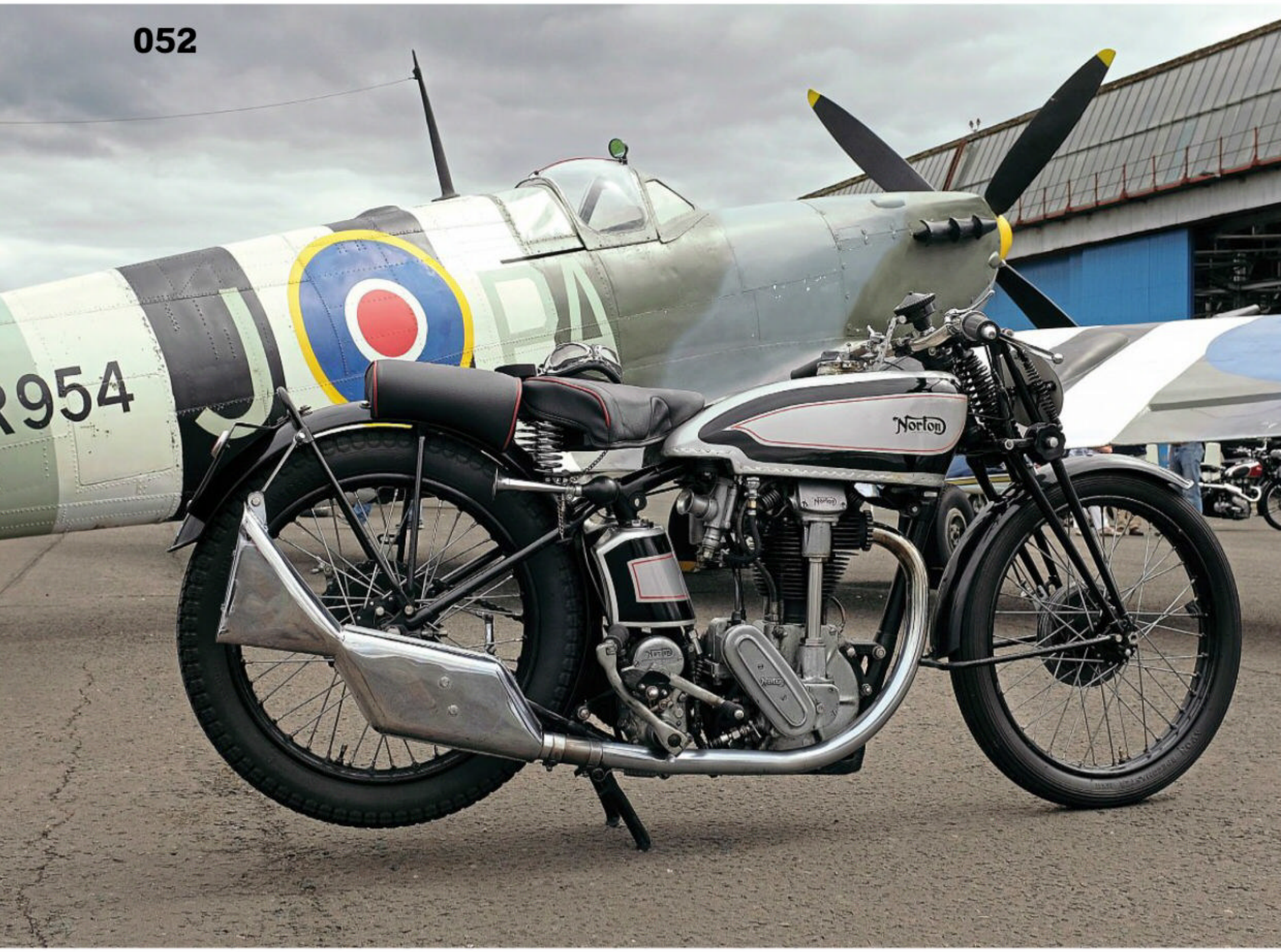

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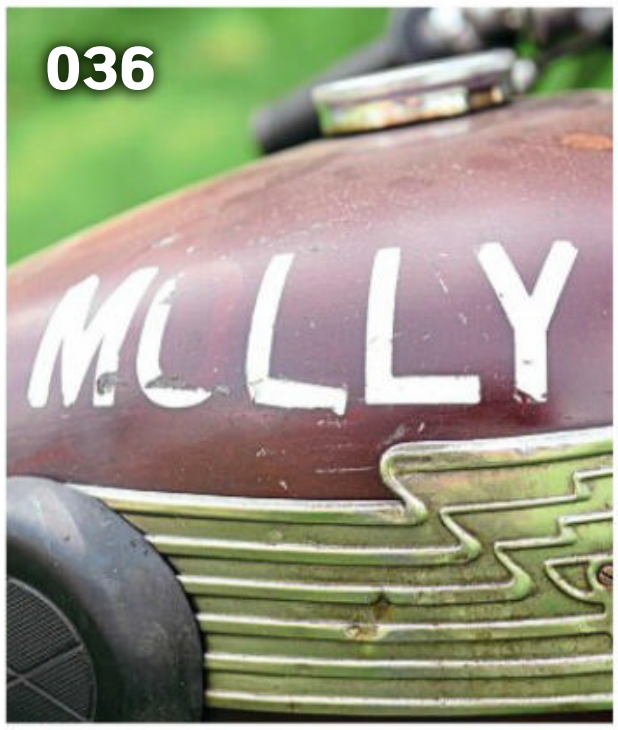

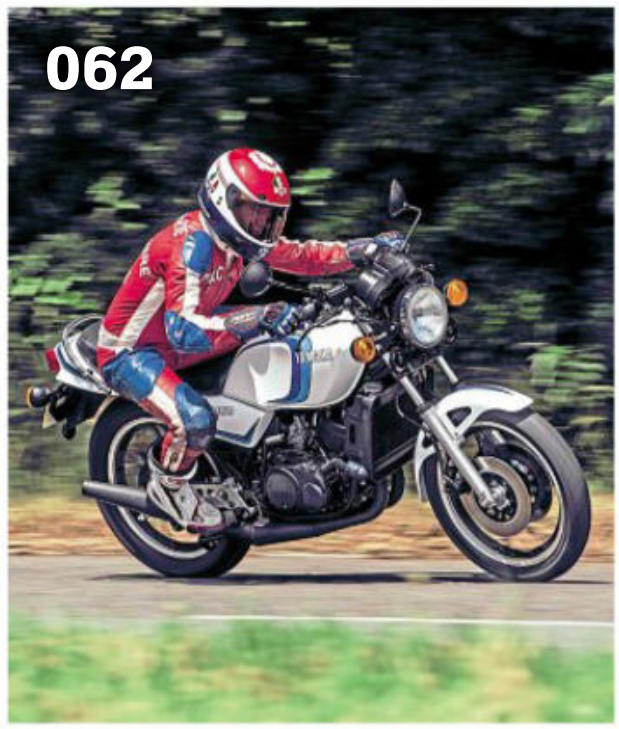

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Impressive

TT races in South Africa, January 1924. Here we see R S Moore on his 492cc Sunbeam in the 650cc race, who, as with all smaller capacity and side valve-engined riders, was given a 20 minute time advantage. The races were over 200 miles, with the unlimited race over more than 240 miles, through the wilds of 1920s South Africa. Impressive of both men and machines! CBG

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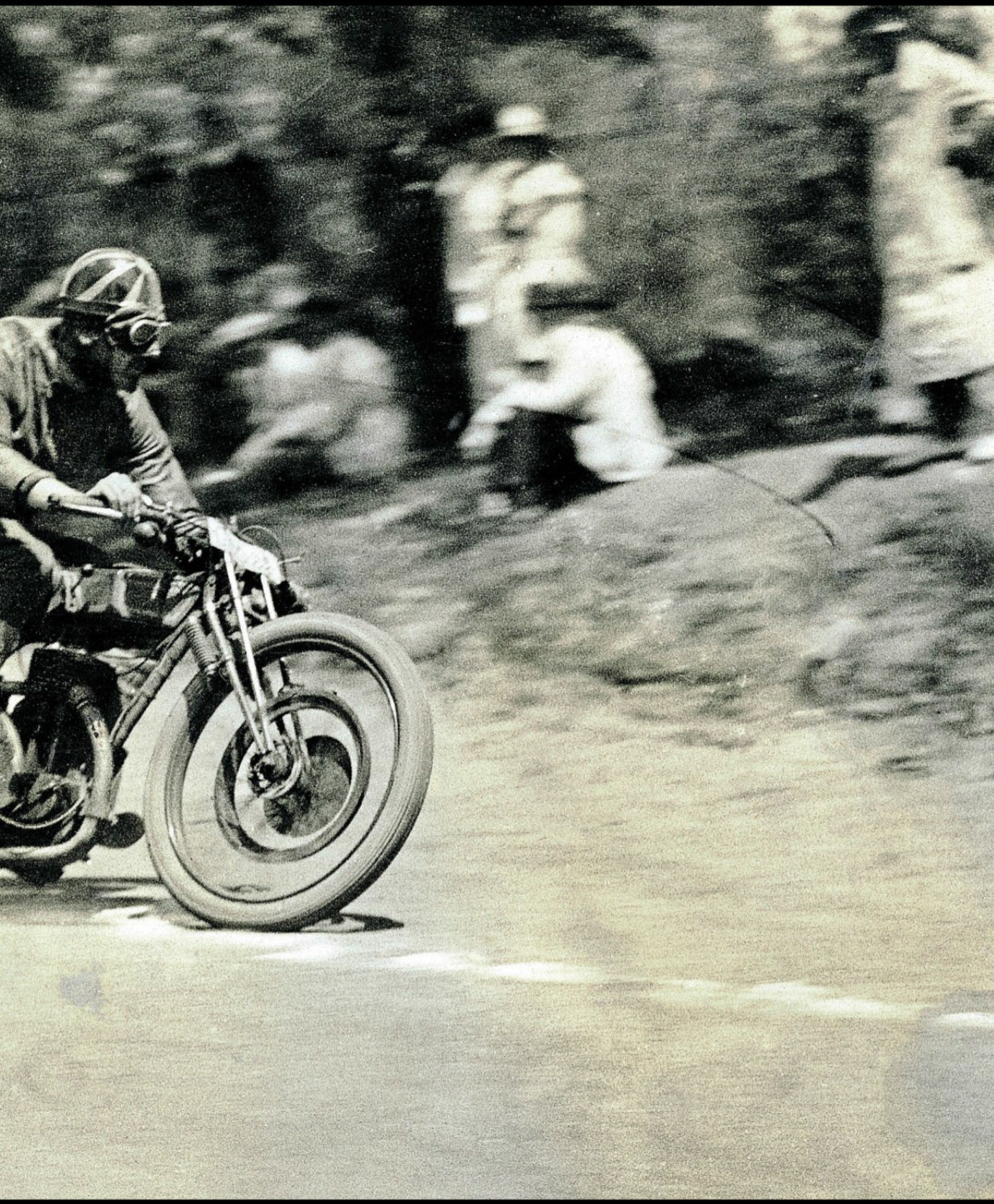

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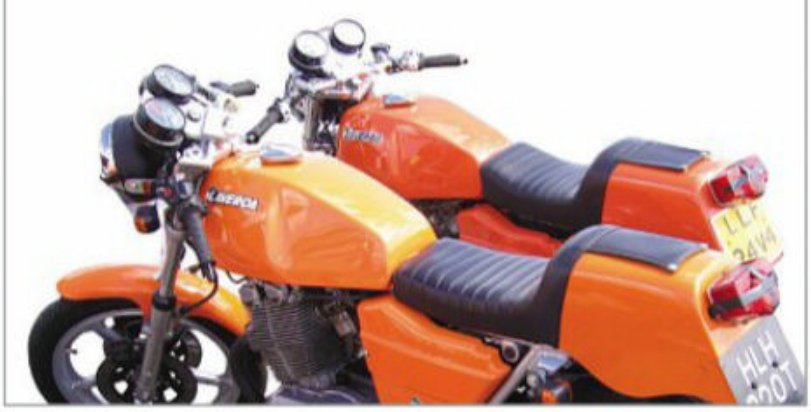

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Fantastic FANTIC!

Kev never forgot the sad, smashed-up Chopper in the scrapyard that he saw when he was 14 years old. Forty years later, he's gone back in time.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM BOLTON

FANTIC KEV ISN'T NICKNAMED FANTIC KEV FOR nothing. Look at the faded period-perfect 1970s Polaroid shot of him – he's seated on one of the legendary super 'peds of the day, a purple Super T Fantic GT 50cc, outside Digby Motors of South Harrow, North West London. At 16, he had already owned a red Fantic GT, and 40 years on, Fantics still figure in Kevin Powell's life.

"I'd first seen a Fantic Chopper when I was 14 back in 1974, in a scrapyard. It had been crashed, but I was struck by the odd shape of the motor and fuel tank, and I was amazed that there was even a 50cc chopper in existence!

"I then owned other Fantics, but first bought a Chopper in December 2006. It was a UK 125cc model on eBay, and was in a state. It had been sat in a garage, and there was no record of its past, or numberplate. Bits were missing, it was rough and it had a rough 'Easy Rider'-inspired sort of stars and stripes paint job. I saw the potential though, and bought it."

Having purchased the bike, Kevin then unexpectedly went through a very tough time in his personal life. He was living in and working on restoring a property during the day, and so he found that channelling his attention into restoring the Fantic in the cold winter evenings helped him through a tragic and difficult period. Incredibly, by July 2007, Kevin had completed the restoration and the Chopper ended up in the stunning condition you see in the photos here, proving that working on motorcycles can also undoubtedly be therapeutic.

WHO WERE FANTIC?

Fantic was founded in 1968 in Barzago, Lecco, Lombardy in Italy, by Mario Agrati and Henry Keppel Hesselink. They quickly gained a reputation for offering products with excellent finishing and quality, and specialised initially in enduro models. Following the presentation of a Chopper prototype at the 1971 Milan Show, the launch of the 50cc Chopper in 1972 was a brave move and represented the first production 'chopper' to be sold.

Fantic tapped in to the early 1970s craze for choppers and customs, and anyone now over the age of 50 in the UK, at least who was into cool stuff as a kid, would have lusted after one of these, or more probably had to make do, if you had understanding parents, with the equally cool bicycle version, the Raleigh Chopper.

The 50cc Fantic Chopper version with massive and outrageous kicked-up silencer was slow and underpowered, but the 125 was a genuine rider. Built in 7000 examples over the early and mid-part of the 1970s, the Chopper 125 sold well, bolstered by good press reviews, and way out marketing and ad shots. These ads featured mainly young groovy people looking for 'freedom' and independence from an otherwise bland 1970s background, and so the Chopper offered an 'Italianised' version of the American bike culture of the time that featured long forks, high seats and tall sissy bars.

Most of the 125s were not built on a continuous production chain but in small batches on request for export markets such as France, Germany, and the UK – it should be noted that because there was no 'moped' culture in the USA, the Chopper, though inspired by Easy Rider and American chopper culture and style, was never actually exported to the USA.

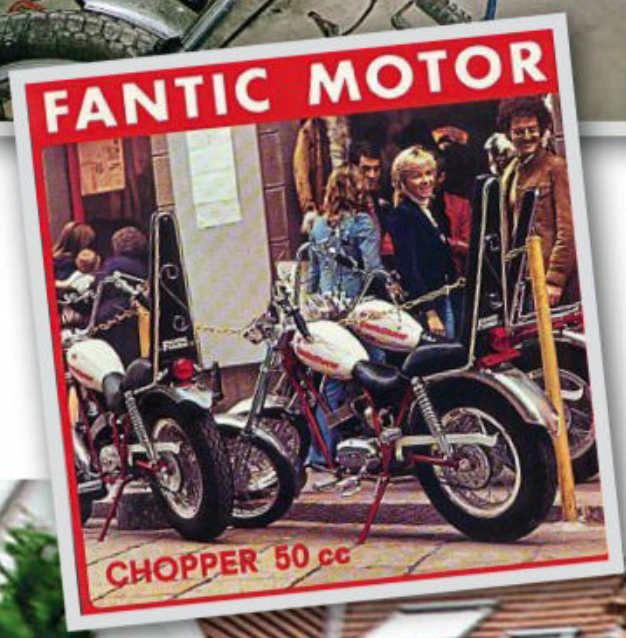
The frame and 32mm forks were made in the Fantic factory, and the big 5.00-16 rear tyre was supplied by Pirelli, who apparently thought at the beginning that the request for such a motorcycle tyre for an Italian motorcycle manufacturer was a joke.

The motor was a lively two-stroke Minarelli 125cc unit with five-speed unit gearbox, and was modified in-house by Fantic to supply the most torque possible. It was easy to start, didn't suffer from vibrations and the machine actually handled and performed well, with a two-up 70mph cruising speed possible. Rear shocks were adjustable five ways on the spring, with a handy lever, and the rider had view of a large Veglia speedo, even though chopper style in real life didn't actually really include them. Indicators were fitted as standard, and the overall fit and finish was very impressive.

Roll on 40 years, and the Chopper is by now already a rare machine, many having met their fate over the years in the hands of young, inexperienced owners.

Kev certainly had to have patience and ingenuity throughout his restoration work, as the bike was

"Following the presentation of a Chopper prototype at the 1971 Milan Show, the launch of the 50cc Chopper in 1972 was a brave move and represented the first production 'chopper' to be sold"



missing the correct handlebars, the plastic toolboxes, front stainless mudguard, and indicators, but luckily still had the sissy bar, which Kev says is an extremely rare part to find.

"First thing I did was get the wheels respoked by a local motorcycle shop. The rims are Borrani aluminium and the rear is a 16in, so hard to find! The frame was the next problem, as someone had cut off the rear footrest mounts. I had spoken to several very helpful people over the internet about some parts. You really have to do your research and need to have good contacts, many of whom I've met via online Fantic clubs and forums.

"I met one owner, Paul Barker, who now lives in Australia, to see his complete bike. This was helpful to find out the measurements or the footrest rear mounts, and I spent a few hours there just taking photos and chatting to Paul about the bikes. He also sold me a few parts that I needed too - this visit was a big help to me for information on the bike. I then spoke ➧

to another enthusiast, Jim Graham. He had a 125 too, but one of his toolboxes was cracked, and mine were missing. We spoke about the bikes in detail, and Jim very kindly decided to trust me with his one good plastic box as I decided it would be easier for me to actually make my own boxes from scratch, seeing as the originals are impossible to source.

"I made the moulds for the lids and the base in a few days from GRP (glass fibre), but there were other parts in the second box I needed to copy too, so to trust me with these rare parts was very good of him. I promised Jim I'd make him a pair of boxes for letting me use his only patterns. I did that and it all worked out well.

"After welding the frame and filling all the welds, I took the frame to a local spray shop with just a single nut as a pattern for the colour! The guy said he would be able to get a colour match from the nut, and he did, after a couple of attempts – amazing! The colour is called Candy Apple Red, a candy red over a gold base. They also did the pearl white fuel tank, and I added the decals which are remade by a guy in Australia, who supplies the whole set required.

"I built up the forks that had been rechromed by AM Philpot the famous hard chrome experts over here, and made the tool boxes myself, some of which I then sold on eBay too, which helped finance some of the resto."

The motor, which is a two-stroke, five-speed Minarelli unit was actually running when Kev bought the bike, but needed further attention too. "I had to rebore the barrel and fit a 55.2mm oversize piston – luckily I found a few Minarelli pistons in the USA. I also fitted new bearings, seals and a new con rod – these motors were always thoroughly thrashed by their teenage owners," says Kev. "It was tough to find the correct bars too. The metal scroll between them is actually fitted with small clips, and is not welded on as many people make the mistake of doing. The width of the bars is crucial, and I went through five sets and made my own until I found the original ones.

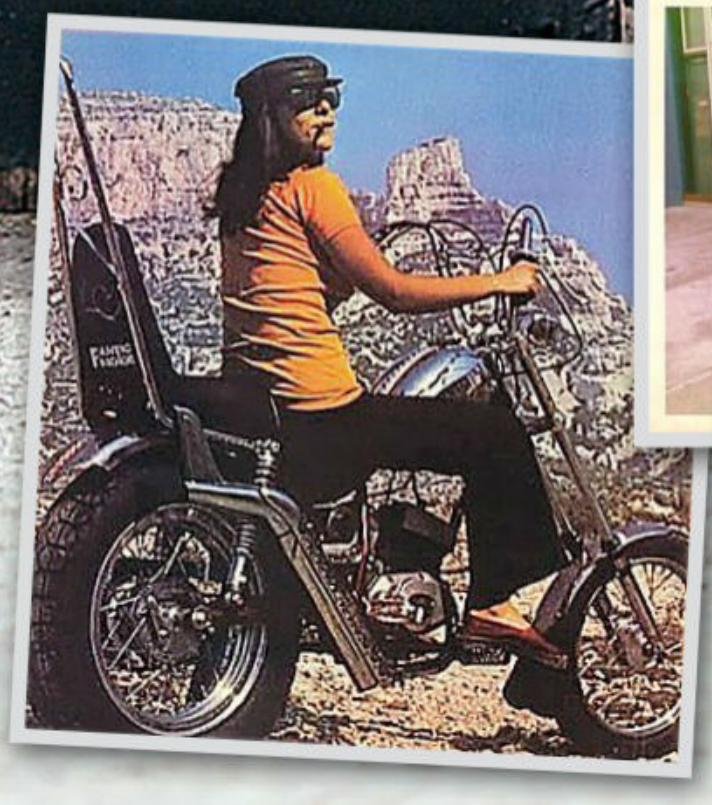
"Apart from the boxes, the bars, sissy bar, mudguards and headlamp are the toughest parts to come across for this bike. My headlamp had the front lens and rim missing, and I noticed there was a number stamped into the headlight bowl. One night, I Googled this number, and was shocked to find the correct 6v 30w light on a US eBay seller's list, so I bought it. To this day I have never found another anywhere, and the light was brand-new. It cost me a bit but was a major part of the jigsaw found."

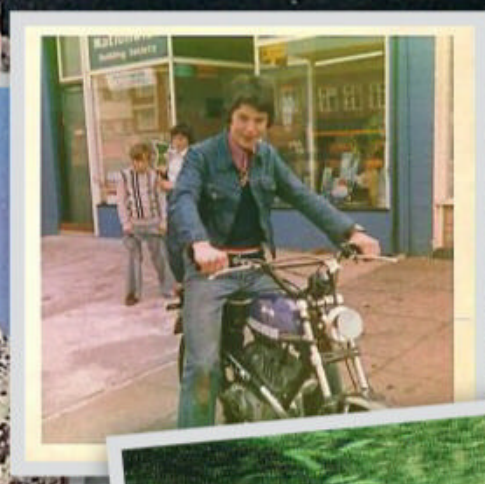
Kev's attention to detail in the restoration is amazing, even including the sticker with Fantic's factory address on the frame down tube.

Kev's Fantic Chopper is stunning in the metal, and he doesn't just polish it, he rides it too. "I love riding it! I've done 100 mile runs, though I need to rest after about 60 miles, because you sit in the dip in the seat, and in reality the backrest is nowhere near your back, but it's okay for a pillion. The motor is strong, and I can cruise at 60, 70 sometimes. The handlebars are actually more comfy than they might look. It really was a bike built to ride and to be used, and not just a gimmick. Fantics are generally very reliable, and this one is no different.

What's best about the Fantic Chopper is that it is

"You really have to do your research and need to have good contacts, many of whom I've met via online Fantic clubs and forums. I met one owner, Paul Barker, who now lives in Australia, to see his complete bike."





1976 FANTIC (TX 131) CHOPPER 125

ENGINE: Air-cooled single cylinder, unit construction, flat piston, 3 port two-stroke **BORE X STROKE:** 55mm x 52mm **DISPLACEMENT:** 123.48cc **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9.3:1 **LUBRIFICATION:** 5% two-stroke mix, 1.5 litres of SAE30 oil **IGNITION:** 6v battery and coil , flywheel magneto, Marelli CW240L spark plug **FUEL SYSTEM:** Dell'Orto VHB 25 BS carburettor , fuel capacity 6.5 litres including reserve **ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:** 6V-9Ah battery, 60W-6V dynamo, Aprilia 130mm headlight **TRANSMISSION:** five-speed unit gearbox , primary gears and chain, front sprocket 13 teeth, rear 46, 1:3.54 ratio **FRAME:** duplex cradle frame in steel **CLUTCH:** multiple disc in an oil bath **SUSPENSION:** Front telescopic forks with 32mm tubes in Durocrom, rear twin shocks with five-way adjustment lever **BRAKES:** Front 123mm drum, rear 140mm drum **WHEELS:** Light alloy Borrani rims, front 1x16", rear 3.00x16" **TYRES:** Front 2.75x16, rear 5.00x16 **DIMENSIONS:** length 2100 mm, wheelbase 1450 mm, max. height 1400mm, max. width 770mm , seat height 650mm, footrests height 220mm **WEIGHT:** Weight (wet) approx. 108kg **POWER RATING:** 15.5bhp @ 6,800 rpm **TOP SPEED:** 71mph/115 kmh declared

"I love riding it! I've done 100 mile runs, though I need to rest after about 60 miles, because you sit in the dip in the seat, and in reality the backrest is nowhere near your back, but it's okay for a pillion"

just so crazy looking and so outrageous as a concept, but it captured the attention, that's for sure, like few other mass-produced motorcycles ever have. I follow Kev on my bike along the North Circular to the famous rocker hangout, the Ace Cafe, and people stare and point at him; or the bike at least. One lad at the Ace even asks Kev if it's a brand-new model. On the road, I'm on my old Guzzi but am often left behind by the quick acceleration of the Fantic in front of me, though it is decidedly odd riding behind such a small bike with in contrast such a tall seat and sissy bar, in front of me.

Back at Kev's place further along the North Circular from the Ace, I glance into Kev's shed and restoration hub, which only confirms his passion for Fantic, as it's filled with beautiful and rare trial and regolaritá Caballero models, and various other hard to find Fantic parts. Someone drops by to drop off a motor for Kev to cast his experienced eye over, as he also restores Fantics for other enthusiasts. Kev's the man to search out on Fantic forums if you've got a Fantic Chopper, or need some information on these fantastic and crazy machines, or indeed any Fantic. And with the Fantic name now back in production, like Guzzi or Ducati interest in its earlier classic models is likely to only increase, making these early Fantics more collectable than ever. Long live the Fantic Chopper!

Thanks Kev for your time, and thanks to Mark and the Ace Cafe CBG

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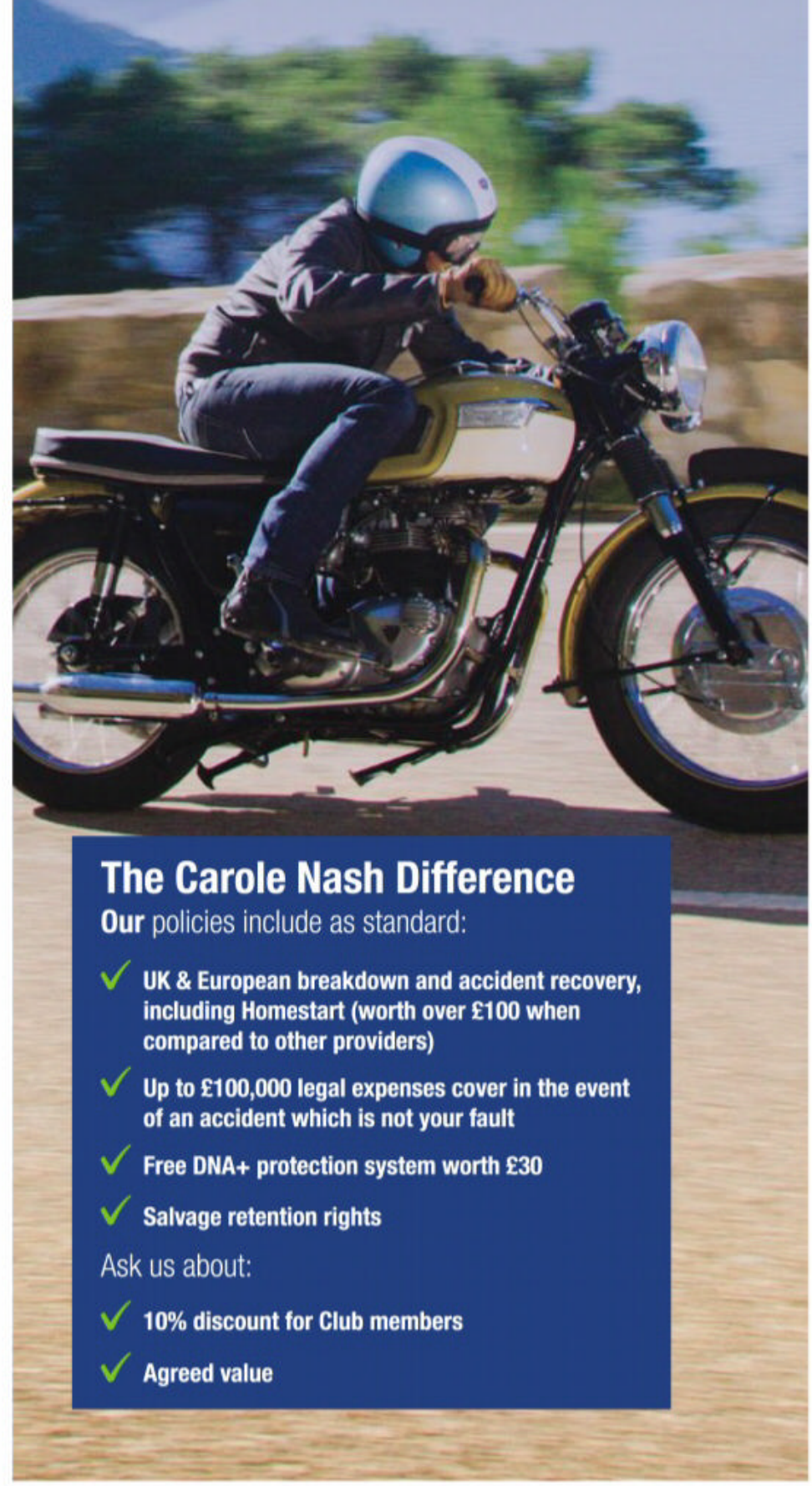

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HELP THE NMM REOPEN, AND WIN A 'NEW' COMMANDO

THE NATIONAL MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM has launched an urgent appeal to ensure the museum can reopen without having to sell some of the collection. You can help out... and could end up owning one of three spotless British classics into the bargain.

The National Motorcycle Museum receives no external funding, relying partly on visitors' support, but mainly on the income from the museum's conference business and two sister hotels. With the hospitality and leisure sector one of the worst hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, there is uncertainty about when these businesses, the National Conference Centre, Manor Hotel Meriden and Windmill Village Hotel Coventry, will be able to reopen fully, let alone trade profitably.

Museum director James Hewing said: "Without the income from our three sister businesses, there is little likelihood of the museum opening, and then remaining open, until they return to normal trading. The museum itself requires a surplus of around £500,000 per year just to break even. Without making this appeal, we may have to sell some of our reserve collection of bikes, the last thing we would ever have wanted to do.

"Unfortunately, all of our business activities are in one of the hardest hit sectors, and we simply don't know how long they will take to recover."

The museum appeal will give people the chance to help raise the £500,000 required in two different ways.

A special Covid-19 museum appeal raffle has a stunning set of prizes, offering the chance to win one of three classic motorcycles, one new-old-stock and two which have been restored in the museum's workshops. This special appeal raffle will be extra to the normal summer and winter raffles which will operate as usual. First prize in the appeal raffle is a new-old-stock 1977 Norton Commando 850, second prize is a 1948 Ariel NG 350cc and third prize a 1959 BSA B31 350.

A new-old-stock Commando could be yours

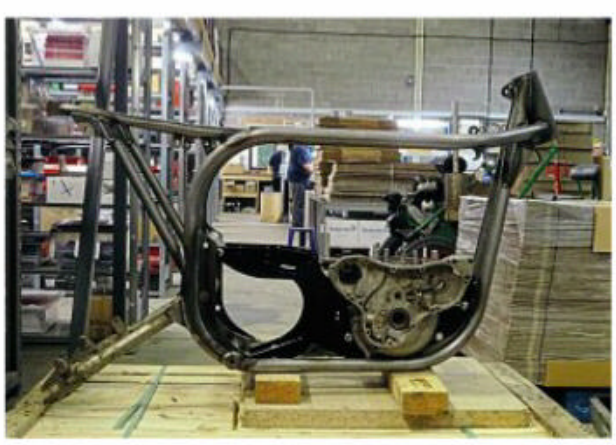
The draw will take place on Thursday December 21 at the National Motorcycle Museum, ensuring three lucky winners will have something to celebrate this Christmas. Tickets cost £6 each and will be distributed during August and Sept 2020 via subscription copies of this magazine. Tickets may also be obtained on-line from **www.thenmm.co.uk**.

Supporters can also back the museum's reopening plans by donating to a special reopening appeal fund. Money donated through a link to the appeal fund donation page on the museum website will be dedicated to helping it remain open until normal trading resumes.

Andover Norton offering new Wideline Featherbeds

BUILDING A NORTON-BASED special or restoring a bike with a bent frame?

Andover Norton has revealed that it has commissioned a batch of brand-new Norton Wideline Featherbed frames for road or racing use. The new frames are replicas of the road-going 1957 Norton Wideline product.



Checking a new Feathered on the jig

They were manufactured by a long-established motorcycle frame maker based near to Andover Norton's Hampshire site.

The frames contain all the original brackets for customers wishing to produce a road bike, although special builders may prefer to remove some. The frames have now passed inspection and are supplied unpainted and made from 2mm (14swg) ERW seamed tube with MIG welds. The frames cost £1495 plus Vat and can be ordered from **andover-norton.co.uk**

New Featherbeds from Andover Norton

John McGuiness on a Sheene Suzuki
PIC: LEE DAVIS

Racing ready to return to Oliver's Mount

A SPECIAL SHORT RACING season has been created for later this summer at Scarborough's Oliver's Mount circuit to give fans a burst of post-lockdown action.

The two three-day events at the only real road circuit in mainland Britain have been created in conjunction with 243 Road Racing Association and are set for August and September.

The Barry Sheene Classic, which was due to take place in July, has now been rescheduled to August 14-16, while the hugely popular Gold Cup will return and has been extended to a three-day meeting to run from September 11-13. Each meeting will have three days of road racing action, practice and qualifying on Friday, with two full days of racing on Saturday and Sunday.

Oliver's Mount Racing director Eddie Roberts said: "I'm delighted to reveal our exciting plans. We've been forced to delay the calendar, but now to have two three-day meetings is brilliant. More time on track on Friday will allow the riders to get back up to speed, and two full days of racing is unprecedented at Oliver's. We must thank the local council and ACU for their support."

The organisers are in constant touch with the ACU and local council and will abide by any restrictions which may come into effect later in the year. Only a limited number of pre-sold tickets will be available. There will be further restrictions for riders, entrants and for paddock movement and occupancy.

Current day, weekend and season tickets will be valid and tickets in limited numbers will be available from Duke Marketing. If the event does not go-ahead full refunds will be made. Keep in touch with developments at **www.oliversmount.com**

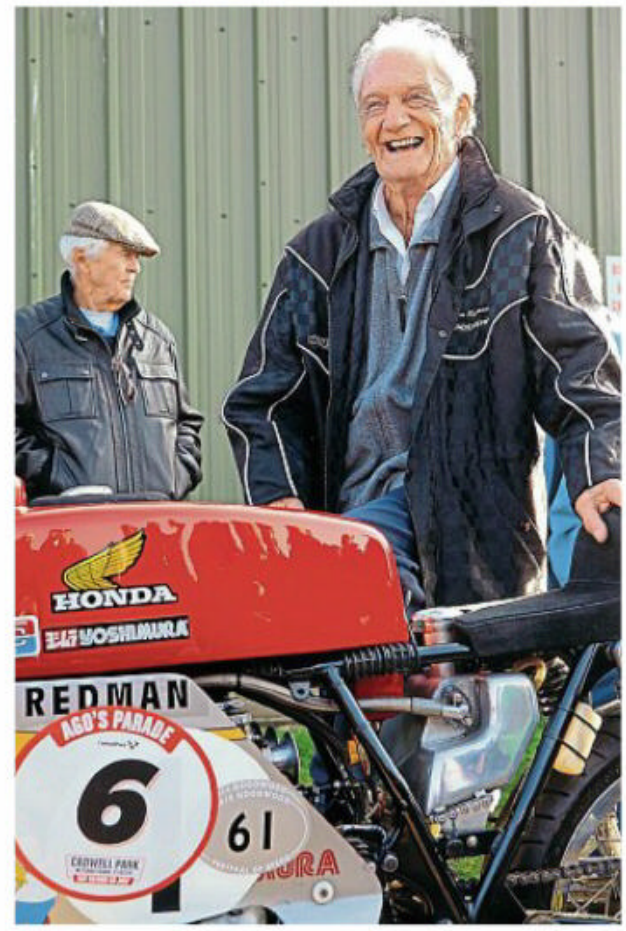
RETURN OF THE JUMBLE

JUMBLES ARE BACK in Sussex and Kent. The first major jumble held since the Covid-19 lockdown hit was held in early July. Further jumbles are scheduled for September and October.

Elk Promotions held its Summer Classic Bikejumble at Ardingly in line with government guidelines, with well over 100 all-motorcycle autojumble stalls.

To make the event as safe as possible for all concerned measures taken included changes to the site plans to deal with one-way traffic and social distancing. Sadly, there were cutbacks on the show element in July to comply with regulations.

The July event was held over a weekend instead of the usual one-day event to manage social distancing more effectively. As well as hand sanitiser available across the site and PPE equipment available at the gate, all stallholders were advised that they must not pack-up early, as it took longer for visitors to get round. The two further events scheduled will take place in the Autumn. On September 13 there is a jumble scheduled at Romney Marsh, Hamstreet, Kent TN26 2JD. The South of England Showground at Ardingly W Sussex RH17 6TL hosts a third jumble on October 25. For more details visit **www.elk-promotions.co.uk**



New rollers from Draganfly

SPARES SPECIALIST DRAGANFLY is regularly adding hard-to-find parts to its catalogue. The latest addition is taper roller head race bearing set for small BSA, Triumph and Ariel singles.

The set, which matches BSA and Triumph part number 65-5319TR, Ariel Colt part number 12755-54, replaces those used on top of all BSA Bantams, pre-unit C group singles, 1946-48 B series pre-units, the Ariel Colt and 1966-69 T20B Triumphs and the bottoms on the plain fork yokes where there is no lip at the bottom. Made exclusively for Draganfly Motorcycles in the UK, the bearings cost £38.29 (£31.91 excl VAT) each. Visit: **www.draganfly.co.uk**

Draganfly get their bearings

HEREFORDSHIRE RIDE WITH POINTS TO PROVE

FANCY A RIDE-OUT with a purpose? The VMCC Herefordshire and Mid Wales Section usually holds its Herefordshire on the Edge event each summer, but this year has replaced it with The Herefordshire Compass Ride, a one-day navigational challenge for individual riders and small, socially distanced, groups.

The ride is open to riders on two or three-wheeled machines which must be more than 25 years old. The opportunity to complete the ride runs until Sunday August 30, and the full distance should be covered in one day. Entrants must design and follow their own route by selecting from a list of 20 points located all over Herefordshire and visiting the four points of the compass within the county boundaries. There is no entry fee, but entrants may wish to seek sponsorship for the section's preferred section charity, St Michael's Hospice, **www.justgiving.com/smhospice** To receive the regulations and details of the stopping points email **herefordVMCC@outlook.com**

SHOWS BACK ON

AS WE EMERGE blinking into the sunlight, shows and jumbles are starting to reappear on the calendar.

The Normous Newark Autojumble is slated to return on September 20, Kempton Park on September 12, and Stratford on September 6. While the EuroJumble at Netley has been cancelled for this year, The Classic Mechanics Show at Stafford is still in the diary for October 10-11. Visit **www.classicbikeshows.com** for further details.

Classic Shows has rescheduled a number of its classic motorcycle and car events, including:

Notts Classic Car & Motorcycle Show, Thoresby Park, Ollerton August 30-31.

Cheshire Classic Car & Motorcycle Show, Capesthorne Hall, Macclesfield August 30.

North Wales Classic Car & Motorcycle Show, Bodrhyddan Hall, Clwyd, September 6.

Festival of 1000 Classic Cars & NW Classic Bike Show, Cholmondeley Castle, Malpas September 20.

Malvern Festival of Transport, Three Counties Showground, Malvern, is now on Sunday, October 11.

Visitors, traders and exhibitors who have already booked into one or more of those events will automatically have their tickets moved to the rescheduled event.

Visit **www.classicshows.org** for details and any late changes.

Parts Sp

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TTP Fire Starter Performance Igniter Unit

The Fire Starter is "Plug & Play", no programming and no need to figure out which maps to use as the correct maps for your bike are installed. Our dyno developed ignition advance curves give you more power & torque, don't suffer from hot or cold start problems and greatly reduce deceleration popping.

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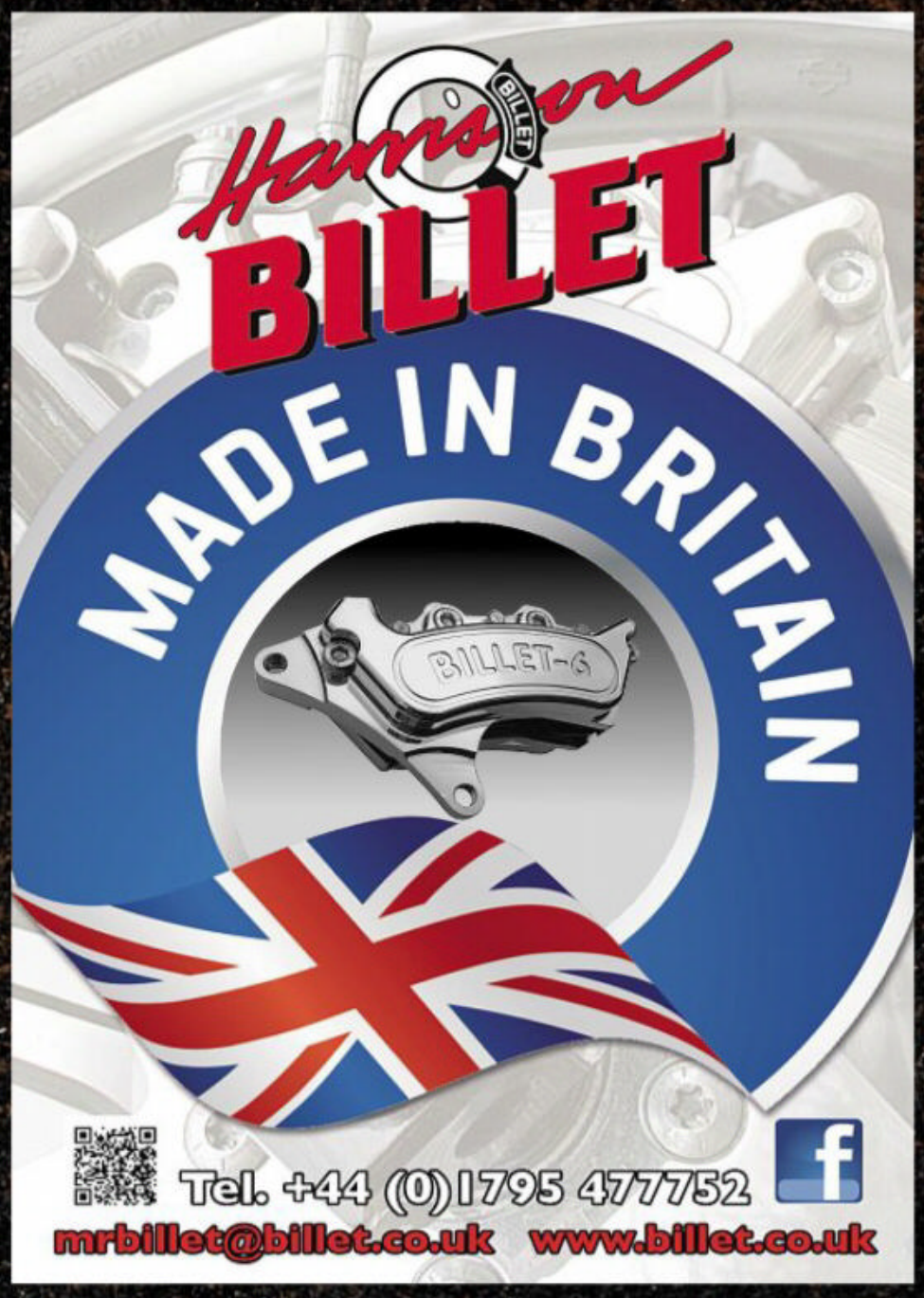
ecialists

While there are a number of companies that seem to specialise in every aspect of our two wheeled world, we have to remember that there are also a large number of companies that specialise in some very specific areas. Not only are these companies likely to have an expansive knowledge of their chosen subject, they're also far more likely to stock the seemingly rare and unobtainable parts that can't be found at the more generic dealers and suppliers

The logic is clear – if you want a haircut, you don't go to the supermarket. So, if you want a certain part for your classic motorcycle, then you approach the companies that deal in parts and expertise in those very models. And look what we have here – a number of specialists whose focus is on certain makes and models of classic motorcycle, just the job!



Letters

STAR LETTER

Experts on the escorts

The motorcycles on page 61 of your July issue are not Welsh registered, but London i.e. Met. On plates of this era the last two letters, not the first two, indicate the relevant licensing authority.

The motorcycles are CYM reg. CY seems to have been taken to indicate Swansea, but actually it's YM that's relevant, a London reg from 1925-1974.

This is in fact a photo from the early days of the Special Escort Group (SEG). It is from 1965 and shows the SEG rehearsing before they travel to the British Show, held in Amsterdam in May, and attended by Princess Margaret. The senior officer on the left is Commander Fleming.

The shot on page 58, of the Victoria Memorial ('the Wedding cake') also shows the SEG.

I believe this to be one of two occasions: either the 1961 visit to London by Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, or the 1964 visit to London by Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman into space.

In the photographs (right) the same saloon '6 BUC' can be seen, presumably a USSR Embassy car. In the Gagarin photo, the sergeant in the centre is the late John Baldwin, who by the time of Tereshkova's visit was the inspector in charge of the SEG, later chief superintendent.

Martyn Hillier QPM

Thanks, Martin – very interesting back story. Matt

■ ***As always, our readers are the real riders and real experts, so picked us up on some great details – thankfully you are all paying attention and we enjoy being put right! Thanks again, Matt***

BSA details

I have just taken a brief look at Issue 350, July 2020 and have just seen my beloved BSA range of motorcycles, namely the A7/A10 series mistaken for an A65; shock horror!

The crime occurred on page 59, picture 1 where two policemen are standing by an A7/10 but the wording would have the reader believe that the bike is the unit construction bubble A65.

The clue to the real identity is the shape of the toolbox just ahead of the rear suspension unit and is clearly the smooth lines of the A10, not the creased version placed on the A65.

Sorry about that, but being the past owner of an A7SS, sometimes with a Jet 80 attached which covered many miles mainly at speed for over three years and clocked up what would be today classed as above average mileage, I know my A7/10s.

Rant over, thanks for another absorbing edition.

Tony Hopkins

Many thanks, Tony. Matt

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Restoration invaluable for sorting my registration

I have a 1958 Norton Dominator 99 which I have owned since purchasing it from Pride and Clarke in 1962.

In the late 1960s I converted it to a 'café racer' but due to family commitments and lifestyle changes (two children and four-wheel transport), the bike has not been on the road since 1970.

Over a protracted period of time I have gradually restored it, still in café racer trim, repainting it, upgrading many parts and replacing most of the nuts and bolts with stainless ones. I am hoping to complete the restoration soon and will need to have the bike entered onto the DVLA database as it is no longer recorded there.

I am always interested to read about restorations or rebuilds from various sources which might prove useful to me in finishing my Norton and registering it with the DVLA. It was with this in mind that I took particular interest in the article in your July 2020 edition of *CBG* entitled 'Corona competitor' but found it very confusing as the photographs of the BSA do not appear to be of the finished article. Also, there was no information regarding the registering of the bike, but I understand this as it was obviously not part of the writer's brief.

The BSA bike is referred to as 'road-legal' but the photographs do not show this to be the case. For example:

1. The front brake is not connected – there is no handlebar lever or cable attached

2. The rear numberplate is illegal and partially obscured by a mudguard stay

3. There appears to be a pillion seat but no associated footrests

4. There is reference to a 'minimalist' speedometer but I could not see one

5. The top photograph on page 14 has the caption 'Is that a road-legal speedway bike?' and the answer would appear to be No!

As the BSA bike had been MoT'd I can only assume that the photographs were taken before its final completion or it was again being worked on at the time they were taken, although there was no reference to this.

Having also repainted the frame on my Norton Dominator (it is now black but was originally red), I am wondering if retaining the red petrol tank and primary chaincase will enable it to be registered as 'red'. I ask this as I note that the DVLA records for the 1954 (not 1957 as in the article) BSA 516 YUA show it as 'blue' when the frame appears to be black and the only blue colour is on the petrol tank. In addition, I see the BSA has an MoT test certificate which expires May 27, 2021. Although an MoT test is not a legal requirement for my Norton or the BSA, I wonder if having one will make the task of registering my Norton easier?

Colin Appleby

Colin and I have spoken since about helping, I shot the bike before the MoT test, which had the brake sorted. The pad was a 'bum stop' and the numberplate is regarded as age related. Matt

Info from an AMC 'anorak'

As an AMC anorak I was pleased to see you had included the Matchless G15/45 in your British Bike Guide in the June issue, these are indeed very nice bikes to ride and I have one from each batch of 1962/63 model years, but some of the rest of the AMC guide left a little to be desired.

In the M20/G9 section you say that the "... 'jampot' rear suspension was replaced by Gang units..." What on earth are Gang units?

In the Model 8/G5 section you say: "They provide a better ride than the early 250 Model 16 (Matchless G3)..." This should of course be M14 (Matchless G2). The M16/G3 section should have read: "69 x 93mm until 1962 then 74 x 81mm then 1964 on 72x85.5mm". Similarly, the M18/G80 section should have read "82.5 x 93mm until 1964, then 86 x 85.5mm".

The BSA B33 article also stated that: "In 1959, like BSA, AMC ditched their magneto and generator set up for an alternator/points arrangement" on their M18/G80 models – it was 1958.

James Haynes

Thanks James, no excuses! Matt

THIS MONTH'S STAR LETTER WINS

The writer of this month's Star Letter wins a Duchinni Swift jacket worth £129.99. The ultimate summer jacket, with large mesh panels that keep you super-cool on the move, while CE armour provides top-notch protection. Rated AA for safety. Find out more at thekeycollection.co.uk

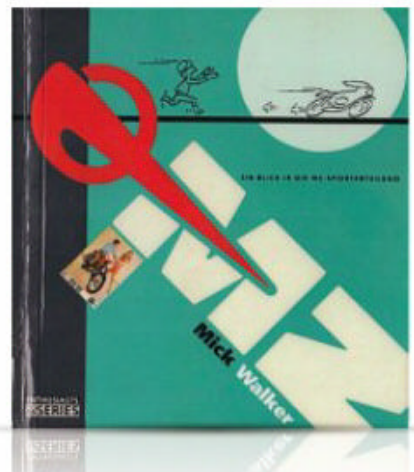
Bookworm

Lockdown library

This month, our resident bookworm, Oli, has been swatting up on MZs and XS650s.

MZ

BY MICK WALKER



WRITING ABOUT A motorcycle that has a wide reach, while at the same time has a passionate and dedicated following, is a minefield for the author. It's even trickier when most of the information available is in a foreign language and shrouded in a fog of 1960s and 70s propaganda and state secrecy.

Mick Walker's book on the MZ makes a fair fist of telling the story of the East German brand in an entertaining and informative fashion. At 140 pages it's not a massive tome, but still manages to cover the whole story and remain readable, eschewing minute technical detail for a broad-brush approach. We get a decent outline of the MZ company's origins as DKW and their vastly important advance of two-stroke technology.

There's a brief dabbling in the politics involved in the re-establishment of MZ at Zschopau in Saxony. It does rather gloss over the life of Hermann Weber, who designed the DKW RT125 that ultimately resulted in the success of so many postwar manufacturers, from BSA to Yamaha.

Weber's death in a postwar Soviet labour camp in 1948 is dealt with in a sad, single, sentence.

MZ's establishment and the development of the best two-strokes in the world at the time gets substantial coverage and the photographs used are rarely seen and clearly reproduced and if anyone has a BK350 horizontally opposed twin featured in the second chapter, I'd love a go on it.

The chapters on the road bikes are interesting and packed with info, and there are bikes that will have passed by most of those with a casual interest, such as MZ's efforts to build a Wankel engined roadster in the mid 1960s.

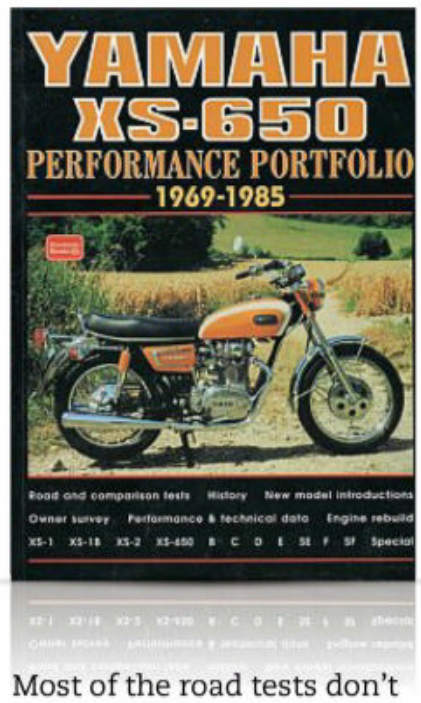
There's lots of coverage of MZ's competition efforts at ISDT and road racing, with Walter Kaaden and Ernst Degner to the fore. Simson, MZ's sister factory, gets a good look in too. While in the UK they are probably best known for their late 1970s "sports" mopeds, this mentions more exotic offerings like their 1957, DOHC RS250, six-speed racing single.

Written in 2005, the book covers the post-DDR collapse and subsequent rebirth of the company as MuZ in 1993 and their later four-stroke singles. There's a lot of interesting stuff in there, and with little other information available about MZ, Walker makes a good job of it. Well worth a read.

- **Redline Publishing**
- **£21.95**
- **ISBN: 0 9544357 4 5**

XS650 Performance Portfolio

COMPILED BY R M CLARKE



AS A YAMAHA XS650 owner struggling to keep my recalcitrant but beloved mount rolling over a 25-year period, I've often been frustrated by the lack of information available about the model, apart from my grubby Haynes manual, which can lack important information.

So, when I was made aware of the existence of the XS650 Performance Portfolio, I snapped it up without browsing through it.

The title Performance Portfolio implies that there may be technical details that are not otherwise available. Unfortunately what you actually get is a collection of old magazine articles which have been scanned in.

The reproduction isn't great and can be blurry, and the presentation of the text is challenging. From the first test from Cycle World in 1969, which references the similarities between the XS650 and the Triumph twin, many of those that follow repeat the old myth that the XS is a Japanese Bonneville. It isn't. It's a lot heavier, much more complex and doesn't come close to handling as well, for a start.

Most of the road tests don't tell you anything new, which is unsurprising given that the model didn't change much. Some of the writing, from the likes of Dave Minton and Mark Williams in the UK, is excellent and the American articles do feature better photography.

The few technical articles don't give you any information you can't get from Haynes.

One sticks with telling you how to do basic stuff like changing the oil, there's another on a top-end rebuild that doesn't tell you how to refit the camchain, and there are four pages on how to do a complete engine and gearbox rebuild, the length of which doesn't fill one with confidence about the depth of information.

There is an article about riding an XS round Australia, which is fun. It's more of a coffee table book for marque and model fans than something that will be plastered with oily fingerprints in your workshop. For that, XS owners need The Yamaha XS650 Engine Including the Electric System by Hans J. Pahl, which is less entertaining, but does at least tell you things you actually need to know.

- **Brooklands Books**
- **£15**
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Products

Bridgestone BT46s transform my BMW R100RT

OUR WORLD of old bikes mainly evolves around engines. Just as well, as the brakes on many of our favourite machines are woeful; the suspension, if we have any, is an afterthought; and the electrics are, well, minimal. But what about tyres?

So many bikes that have been beautifully restored or wonderfully original are on scarily-old tyres, which if asked upon to brake or steer quickly, will stick two fingers up and throw you and your beloved machine on the floor. Yet put an old bike onto modern looking tyres and the purists have a field day – so what to do?

My 1989 BMW R100RT came wearing old Continentals that were so poor the parts that were not cracked felt so hard I guessed they were pre-pneumatic, so had to go. This was confirmed when, at a steady 40mph, I let go of the 'bars and a death weave started like I've never experienced. I like Continentals (when they are not old and misshapen), but for the sake of journalism, I had heard Bridgestone were releasing the new BT46, the replacement for the BT45 (can you see what they did there?) and as I'd used these for years when I had a training school (learners ask a lot from their tyres...) I thought I best give them a go.

I've been on enough tyre launches to know the technology, while important and very, very clever, is as interesting as reading the memoirs of a local council accountant. What I know is the compound of the rubber is the latest technology and will be a compromise between dry grip, wet grip and longevity. The pattern is reassuringly familiar, but the designers have worked hard to improve uneven wear between the blocks of tread that cause weaving and less grip.

Comfort is superb. They make the bike feel like it has got new suspension fitted. The centrestand is taking to its new role as dangleometer! Even on an old bike, wet weather (I got caught out recently) riding is confidence-inspiring, even on the heavy-ish BMW, and even two-up. Only time will tell if they last as long as the BT45s, but with the R100's smooth manners and slightly more sedate touring speed, they stand a good chance of lasting as long as the BT45s did. I'm glad I tried them.

Matt

- **Bridgestone Battlax BT46**
- **Sizes: F – 90/90 18; R – 120/90 18**
- **RRP: F – £85, R – £105 + fitting**

MOTO GUZZI
Le Mans

The Moto Guzzi Le Mans series offers an Italian, race-bred, flagship bike, for less than you may think. But it's not for everyone, so read on!

WORDS BY OLI HULME

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLI HULME AND MORTONS ARCHIVE

MOTO GUZZI'S LE MANS WAS THEIR FLAGSHIP BIG SPORTSTER FROM 1975-1993, produced in five different incarnations and has achieved legendary status. The V-twin engine used in the Le Mans first appeared in 1960 as the powerplant for a tricycle half-track for the Italian Army. It was then used in a chunky tourer, the Ambassador, before ace designer, Lino Tonti, got his hands on it. He first tried to improve high speed handling by lifting the front of the engine, which would otherwise ground on fast corners. He did this by relocating the generator from the top of the engine to the front and raising the engine, but found the change in centre of gravity badly affected the handling, so he designed a new frame and created the sporty V7 750 and 750s.

Tonti carried out a lot of the work in the race shop and at home, as the factory in Mandello Del Lario on the shores of Lake Como was riven by strike action. Some of the first bikes were works racers that took part in the Le Mans 24-hour race in 1971 and as a result, a Le Mans model was announced in 1972. But this coincided with the takeover of Moto Guzzi by Alejandro De Tomaso which delayed the launch. He wasn't keen on the V-twin layout, but Tonti talked him round, and the first Le Mans roadster appeared at the Milan show in 1975.

While the 750 Sport had reintroduced the idea of a seriously sporty Guzzi, the Le Mans that arrived in showrooms in 1976 was something special. With 8mm added to the stroke, increased compression and a whopping great pair of Dell'Orto carbs with bellmouths/velocity stacks, the Le Mans was a performance Italian bike to lust after.

It was unusual in that it lacked the vast quantities of shiny bits that were in fashion. It had next to no chrome, swept back black exhausts, dull alloy, a simple but striking paint job, and an absence of fancy flashes stuck on everywhere, apart from the reflective panel on the nose fairing. It was Italian style at its very best.

It came along as several European manufacturers were releasing big imposing sports tourers. Guzzi's closest rival, BMW, had the R90s, Laverda were about to launch their awe-inspiring triples and Ducati were already staking a claim for greatness with their 750 and 900ss L-twins. What Guzzi managed was the brutish format of the R90s in a better frame, a hefty 80bhp and the good looks that rivalled the Ducati.

The paint job on the Le Mans was a statement in itself; Italian racing red, with matt black panels or a cool metallic light blue. A handful of models were completed in white. The Le Mans would reach 125mph, had massive torque and punchy acceleration. The gearbox wasn't exactly slick by Japanese standards, so the massive torque helped a lot. There were cast alloy wheels too.

The Le Mans, like the company's other V-twins, featured Moto Guzzi's linked braking system which allows one of the front discs and the rear brake to operate from the foot pedal. The handlebar lever operates just the other front caliper.

The Le Mans could out-perform the BMW and looked so much cooler, while the handling was close to that of the 900 Ducati and superior to the Laverda.

The original Le Mans impressed the motorcycling press with its confident, sure-footed handling, excellent braking and aggressive styling. Roy Armstrong won the Avon Roadrunner Production Series in 1977 on a Le Mans 850, beating the Laverda Jotas of Slater Brothers on a bike he rode to meetings.

The infamous Moto Guzzi wind tunnel that is still there!

In the autumn of 1978 Moto Guzzi introduced the Le Mans MkII. This was near-identical to the first Le Mans mechanically and was more of a cosmetic revamp, with a look that hasn't aged as well as the Mk1. It had new bodywork with a larger nose fairing featuring a rectangular headlight, as well as fairing lowers used on the touring Guzzi Spada. Moto Guzzi had used their famous wind tunnel to design it. Inside the nose fairing there was a huge foam and plastic instrument cluster with a row of idiot lights, also used on the Spada. The fairing lowers when combined with the clip-on bars made for a troublesome riding position and riders with longer legs found they had to stick their knees out into the breeze.

The MkII is usually seen in red, but also got a less aggressive blue paint job and a rather classy black and gold livery, too. The yokes on a MkII were rather wider than those on a MkI which reduced the sharpness of the handling while the forks featured De Carbon damper units which were long and thin items that sat inside the fork legs. The idea was that these dampers would provide soft springing with firm damping to make the handling both taut and comfortable at the same time. This was a bit of a tall order yet worked most of the time, though some riders preferred the previous set up which had a feel they were more familiar with.

Across the Atlantic buyers got the CX100, which was essentially the same bike as the MkII but used a 1000cc twin in a softer state of tune, to meet US emissions regulations.

In 1983, the Le Mans got a major makeover and emerged as, you guessed it, the MkIII. The new body kit was more angular as was the fashion of the time. The MkIII got new instruments and switchgear. It also got thicker, glossier paint on the frame and bodywork. The engine got some major changes including barrels with squared-off cylinder fins, while Nikasil-coated bores that replaced the steel bores and chrome rings of the previous two models. These machines were available in red, white and silver.

The MkIII sold well but only lasted a few years before being replaced in 1985 by the Le Mans IV. This saw the engine grow to 948cc and sported a compression ratio of 10.2:1, huge 47mm intake and 40mm exhaust valves, and 88mm Nikasil bores. Guzzi also added a racing camshaft and the MkIV could do a 12s quarter mile and top 135mph.

WHAT IS IT?
A head-turning shaft-driven Italian sports tourer

GOOD POINTS?
The handling, power, braking, riding experience

BAD POINTS?
The riding position, and finish can be a little iffy
How much?

COST?
A project:
£3500 to £5000
A decent, clean runner:
£4500-£8500
Concours Mk1:
£17,000

MAX'S LE MANS MK1½

When the Le Mans MkII arrived, pundits raved about the new look. Nowadays the Le Mans MkI is the one to go for, but in 1978 it was felt that the wide nose fairing on the MkII would protect the hard-charging tourer from the worst of the elements. The fairing lowers, it was claimed, would protect the rider's legs, allowing the Le Mans to be a perfect all-weather sports tourer.

Max von Tyszka's Le Mans is, he says, more of a Le Mans Mk1½. Max hasn't owned a Japanese bike since he passed his test, preferring British or Italian bikes.

Registered in August 1978, this Mk1½ was one of the first Le Mans MkII bikes on the road in the UK. At some point in the subsequent 42 years, someone decided that the sexy little nose fairing from the Mk I was the way to go and it was converted into a MkI lookalike. It is so obviously a lookalike that it's clear the previous owner hasn't attempted to fool anyone. It was simply an admission that the MkI is prettier, or at least, more handsome.

Max bought his Le Mans about 18 months ago. "It didn't need much at first, just the paint refurbishing and the seat recovering. The old one had split so I got it recovered and reshaped."

The paint was sorted out by Joeby's Airbrush Art, who added the orange stripe on the front of the fairing and the seat was recovered by a neighbour who usually does furniture upholstery. There are Tomaselli gold commander clip-ons and the original instrument cluster from the MkI. The exhaust system, through which the Guzzi plays its symphonies, is an aftermarket item which is a good few inches shorter than stock. As well as producing a glorious noise it makes it easier to get the back wheel out.

Max has spent a good part of the past 18 months improving and fettling his Le Mans. "I replaced the

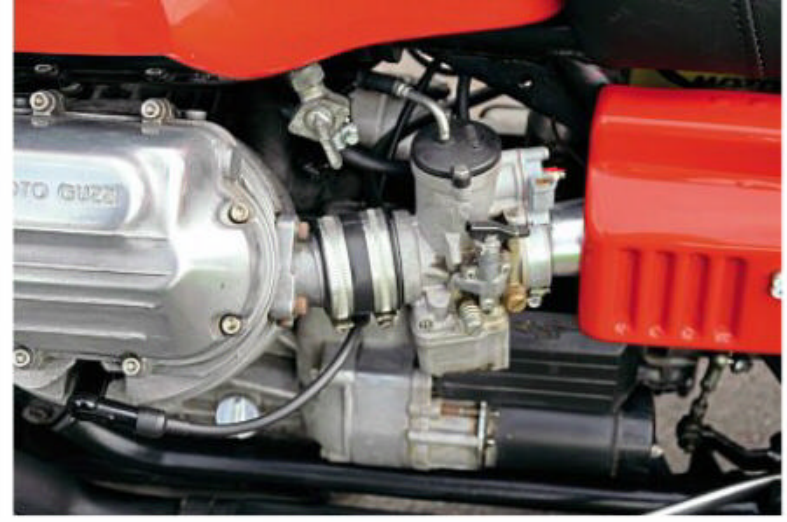
electronic ignition module with a new Dynatech and while the tank was off being painted, I gave the oil lines and breathers a good check over. The carbs are 38mm round barrel, flat-topped Dell'Ortos as fitted to BMW sports bikes, which have two injector pumps. They're a lot easier on the wrists than the old square barrel ones. The 38mm Marzocchi forks aren't standard for the MkII either and are bigger than standard. I've changed one set of switchgear for a more modern Domino set. Tyres are Bridgestone BT45."

There are a few niggles with the Mk1½, says Max: "The side stand is famously awful, but it could be that on mine it needs the mounting bracket bending. There is a neutral in the gearbox somewhere. One issue I have had is the starter motor switch gear which was a bit rubbish about turning itself off. I once rode five miles, stopped and found it was still spinning, which is why there's new switchgear. I use Gutsi Bits for Le Mans parts and Bitza Bikes for all my consumables.

"I couldn't afford to buy a bike that needed a lot doing to it. I wanted an air-cooled twin and was actually looking for a V50 Monza when this came up for £5,500. I'd had a California and imagined that was what all Moto Guzzi V-twins were like, but I've never ridden a bike that handles like the Le Mans. I've never felt so confident on a motorcycle."

"Roy Armstrong won the Avon Roadrunner Production Series in 1977 on a Le Mans 850, beating the Laverda Jotas of Slater Brothers on a bike he rode to meetings"

"It's not clear who Tonti used to set up the Le Mans, but whoever it was must have had very short legs, size 13 feet, a long torso and flexible arms"



The MkIV got new 40mm forks, full-floating Brembo discs, five-spoke mag wheels and a stronger and a redesigned swingarm. In the pursuit of quality, Koni shock absorbers replaced Marzocchi items. Unfortunately, fashion and the tyre manufacturers dictated that the new Le Mans got a 16in front wheel, which was used without changing the frame geometry, badly affecting the handling. The front of the bike got a new and attractive quarter-fairing, but the new side panels and tail fairing weren't a success, being bigger than they needed to be and detracting from the earlier bikes' stripped-down aesthetic. Internally the gearbox got closer ratios and a higher top gear on the last MkIV SE models.

In 1988 the Le Mans V saw the big twin become a sports tourer with a frame-mounted fairing that improved the handling and retained the swoopy rear bodywork. Moto Guzzi had returned to the traditional 18in front wheel and the use of black chrome on the exhaust on some editions, as well as the red or black livery.

The Le Mans, in whatever form, broke all kinds of conventions. By the late 1980s hardly anyone was building push rod twins with the big loping power delivery, yet Guzzi persevered.

Most of the specialists are devoted to the brand, while Guzzi owners are fanatical about their chosen steeds, are open and friendly. There's an air of quiet satisfaction among them, the kind that you get from being so certain in your choice that you don't feel the need to make a fuss about it.

THE GUZZI LE MANS MK1½ ON THE ROAD

It couldn't have been a better day to try out a Le Mans, being warm and dry, with empty roads. At first feel the Le Mans seemed to fit me perfectly. It was surprisingly easy to paddle about, probably down to the relatively low weight and low centre of gravity. It lurched from side to side as it started on the button, though not as much as my old BMW 100/7 from the same era had. I quickly settled down to a lumpy throb like all good V-twins, you can understand why so many modern manufacturers have changed the firing order on their twins to replicate it. There's just something special about a big Italian V-twin and the way it feels.

Then I had to actually ride it, and for a few moments the gloss came off a little. Not because of the way it performed, but because of the riding

SPECIFICATION (MODELS VARY)

ENGINE: 844/978cc air-cooled four-stroke 90 degree V-twin **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9.5:1/10.2:1 **CARB:** 36/40mm Dell'Orto **POWER:** 80bhp@7,500rpm **TRANSMISSION:** five-speed gearbox/ twinplate clutch, shaft drive **FRAME:** Tubular steel spine frame with removeable bottom rails. **SUSPENSION:** 36/38/40mm front forks, swinging rear fork with twin shock absorbers **BRAKES:** 300mm Brembo front discs, one linked to a 242mm disc at the rear **WHEELS/ TYRES:** 3.50 x 18 front and 4.10 x 18 rear (MkIV 16in front wheel **ELECTRICS:** 12V, points ignition (MkI/II **DIMENSIONS:** Wheelbase 55in (1398mm) Seat Height 30in (762mm), Weight 433lb (196kg)

position. It's not clear who Tonti used to set up the Le Mans, but whoever it was must have had very short legs, size 13 feet, a long torso and flexible arms. An orangutan's dimensions would have suited it better.

When you start rolling along, the height you have to lift your feet to get them on the footrests seems huge at first, and then the racing crouch has you contorting yourself at all kind of weird angles. This is a challenging thing to deal with at low speeds. The consequences of hitting a patch of gravel at 5mph with feet up doesn't bear thinking about.

All that being said, it's not everyday someone gives you the keys to a genuine legend. The only thing to do is crack on, so I did, and the experience was everything I wanted. The challenging riding position combined with a gearshift that was firm and positive rather than slick, again like that on my old BMW, made you want to avoid gearchanges – just get it into third or fourth and open it up, and try to avoid too many changes. With that much torque on tap you don't need to. Power arrives at 4000rpm, at which point the free breathing pushrod vee comes into its own.

The brakes are astonishing for a 1970s motorcycle and the way the engine delivers the power encourages

DO YOU NEED HELP?

OWNERS' CLUB
Moto Guzzi Club GB
www.motoguzziclub.co.uk

SPECIALISTS
NBS
motorcycleservicing.co.uk

Gutsi Bits
gutsibits.co.uk

Made in Italy Motorcycles
madeinitalymotorcycles.com

Right: MkII looks a different beast but has the same heart

WHICH LE MANS IS RIGHT FOR YOU AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR

THINGS TO LOOK out for on all Le Mans models include a clutch that drags or jumps under gear changes. If it does, there's a possibility the splines are worn.

Top end noise isn't necessarily a bad thing. With the heads exposed and quite wide clearances a bit of noise is to be expected. If it doesn't it could be a previous owner had adjusted them too tightly.

If you see oil coming out the hole at the bottom of the clutch casing, the chances are there's a failing seal in there, and you'll have to take the engine out to sort it, though the removable bottom frame rails will make this easier.

If the universal joint on the drive shaft clunks, it's going to need replacing. Useful modifications to look out for are an extended sump – with the appropriate longer dipstick. The bigger sump conversion reduces crankcase pressure. A good, modern, aftermarket electronic ignition set-up is a worthwhile addition.

The very first **Le Mans MkI,** with that striking bodywork and smart little nose fairing with a dayglo flash is the most sought after and commands a huge price differential between it and the later models. The Le Mans MkI and II models had a foam rubber seat which would split and crumble. Pattern replacements are available to order.

The Early MkI had a rounder CEV tail-light, as fitted to pretty much every Italian bike of the mid 1970s from Aermacchi to Morini, before it was replaced by a slender bar light. The bellmouth/velocity stacks on the carbs cause a lot of induction roar and can result in increased bore wear. While 1970's Italian electrics have a reputation for poor quality, the earliest Le Mans is so simple that upgrading it isn't going to be a difficult job.

An unrestored and careworn MkI will cost you £6000. A restored one will have a price heading into the stratosphere, with dealers asking upwards of £17000 for an immaculate example.

The MkII is very close to the MkI, and that's why so many of them now sport MkI bodywork. A bit of research makes this easy to spot. The MkII has a slightly different tank, the yokes wider and the forks are 2mm bigger, and the brake calipers are on the rear of the fork legs rather than the front. The oil filler on the MkII has a longer tube to clear the fairing lowers.

Coburn and Hughes repainted some of the last models in black and gold, a classy paint scheme that had the added advantage of being a bit harder wearing than the original Italian job. As on the MkI, the sidestand is mounted on the front of the frame, and you need long legs to get at it from the seat. The stand design is dreadful, and likely to leave you and your Guzzi lying in a heap if you're not careful.

Using the centrestand is advised, though there's definitely a knack to it. This is not a motorcycle to ride in brogues. An original MkII starts at £6000.

The MkIII is probably the cheapest way of getting into Le Mans ownership while getting a quality mount at the same time. More MkIII bikes were made than any other version. With filters on the carbs there's less engine wear, which is just as well as the Nikasil bores, while capable of high miles, cannot be restored cheaply. It's more cost effective to swap the cylinders if the engine smokes a lot. The steering reverted to the use of yokes with the same dimensions as the MkI. The seat is more conventional and comfier too, though comfort isn't really at the top of the Le Mans buyers' shopping list.

It came with more chrome than the earlier models, which doesn't seem to last as well as the matt black on the MkI and MkII. A good MkIII will cost from £5000.

The MkIV is going to be cheapest of all, though to be honest buying a Le Mans on price isn't entirely recommended. It has a bigger 978cc engine to make up for the drop in performance from carb changes. The use of a 16in wheel also causes trouble today with decent 16in front tyres rare. Fortunately it can be changed for an 18in item easily. It lacks the style of the earlier bikes and the finish wasn't great. You can get a MkIV from £4000.

The MkV had the smallest production run of all the Le Mans models. Although it was made for as long as the MkIII, just over 2000 were sold. It is better than the MkIV, which it strongly resembles, and has improved handling thanks to fine tuning of the frame and other cycle parts, as well as the addition of a frame mounted nose fairing.

You still get the swoopy bodywork, which is something of an acquired taste. A MkV Le Mans is going to be the hardest to find and will set you back from £4500.

Like most 1970s exotica, the mileage on a Le Mans isn't as important as finding a bike with decent history and obvious levels of care. Try to find one from a Guzzi enthusiast.

Above: A MkIII – possibly the best value?

some fast riding. Indeed, it's best not to shut it off too much going into bends, as that will make it sit up and try to go in a straight line. It'll go round most sweeping curves without needing to decelerate anyway. Tighter bends are more of a challenge and the road needs to be read well in advance.

So away with niggles about the riding position. The Le Mans is a gem. It is as good as it looks, being fast, light and characterful. It's delicious to ride, it sounds incredible and looks absolutely stunning. I doubt if the old Coburn and Hughes advertising slogan, "long legged and easy to live with", is in the slightest bit accurate – the bike might be long-legged, but the chances of you putting up with hundreds of miles in the saddle are minimal. It feels as if it would be about as easy to live with as Sophia Loren in a permanent strop, but you'd put up with it, just for the passion. And at the very least it'd keep you flexible. CBG

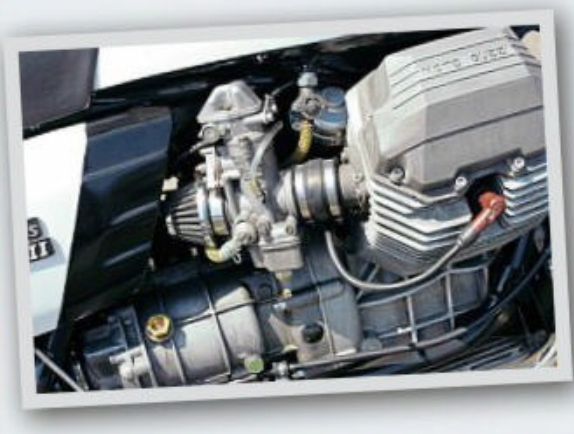
FANCY A LE MANS? TRY A MKIII

APART FROM THE looks, you'll get pretty much the same riding experience from the saddle on any of the I, II or III models, so why not look at a MkIII?

This low miles, white MkIII is for sale at Speed Motorcycles in Exeter. For sale on a Trade/Part Ex basis, the Guzzi will set you back £5999 – about £10,000 less than a restored MkI.

It's more comfortable that the MkI or II, and possibly a little less brutal to ride. The seat is slightly softer, while the footpegs have been mounted on long alloy brackets that seem to be set a little lower than the originals. Certainly, my knees didn't protest as much. It had the clip-ons set slightly higher, which helped too.

On the MkIII the centrestand is just as hard to use, and Moto Guzzi fitted a handle that is at completely the wrong angle to be of any help. It takes a hefty heave to get it onto the stand.



The side stand was relocated on the MkIII to make it easier to operate from the saddle. Unfortunately the geometry is such that to use the side stand you have to actually push the bike beyond 90 degrees to the ground to get it to extend, and there are a pair of very strong return springs which will cause it to flip up unexpectedly if you aren't careful.

Like a lot of Italian bikes of the period, the finish is passable when you can see it, and where you can't see it, such as the inside of the glass fibre fairing, everything is pretty lumpy.

Switchgear is the same set up as on the earlier models which looks better than it works. The instruments are excellent, with a racing style white tachometer taking pride of place on the console, which is much smaller than that of the MkII with the same finish. The squared-off barrels give the engine a more modern aspect, and the carburation is less full-on.

You might consider the 90s style Micron exhaust on this bike a bit out of place, but for your £6k you'll get a genuine Italian classic that will take you for miles and involve you in all sorts of adventures.

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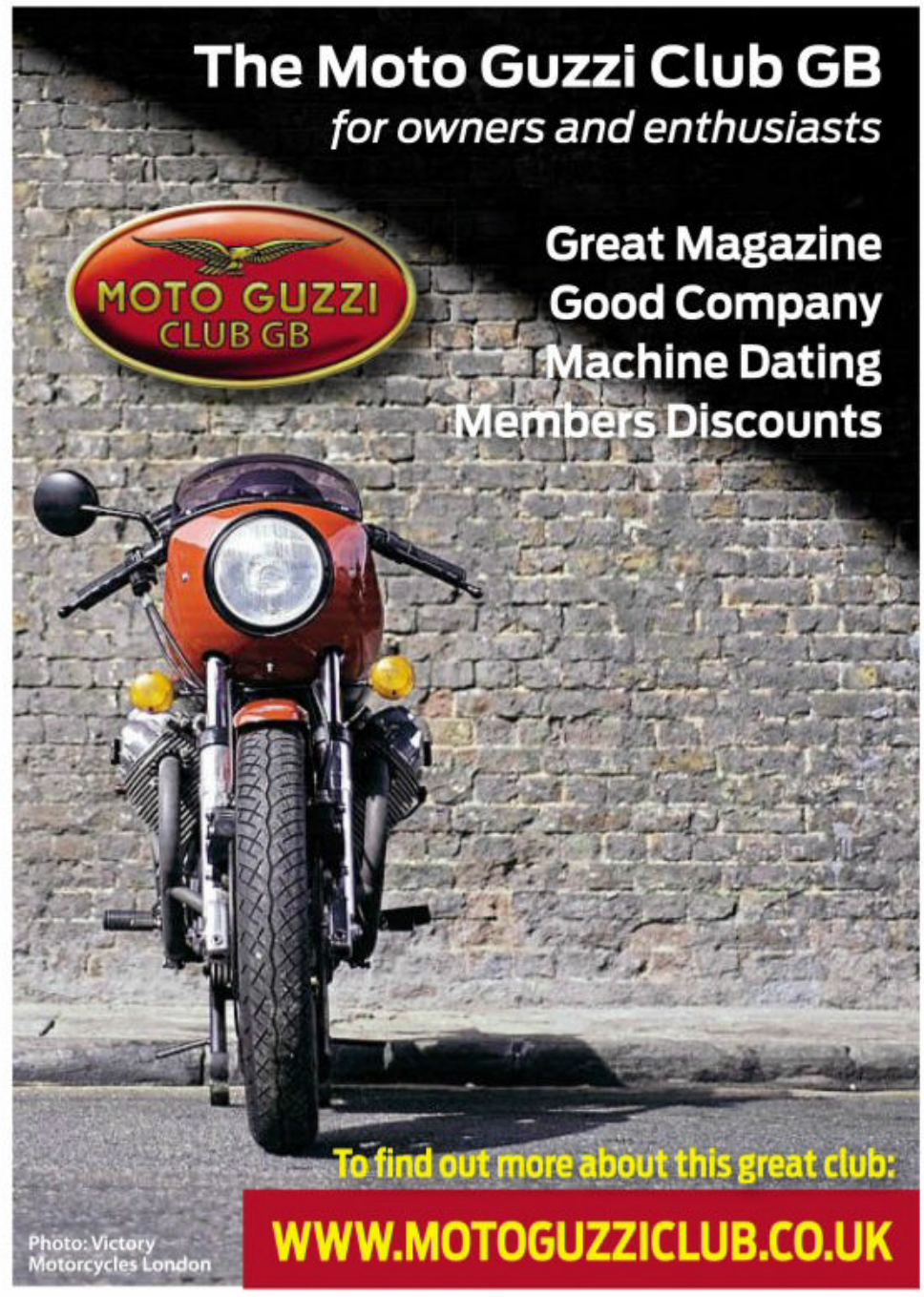

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My life with Molly

Bikes come and go, but some do stay, and they become a massive part of our lives. For John Johnson, Molly, his BSA M33, is that bike

WORDS BY JOHN JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN JOHNSON AND MATT

I had my 16th birthday in April 1967 and proudly set off that day on my father's hand-me-down LE Velocette, having spent many hours in the drive trying to master clutch control. It was a Mk2 version and therefore equipped with a hand starter lever. Unfortunately, this never worked and my father, with myself following, always bump started it which was actually remarkably easy.

It did however cause a certain amount of consternation with the examiner when I took the LE for my driving test the next month, but I assured him it had just gone wrong that morning and we proceeded as if it were quite normal, with a satisfactory outcome.

I then abused the poor old Velocette by getting it to go as fast as possible and exceeding the recommended maximum speed, clearly shown inside the toolbox lid, of 50mph. Well, you had to keep ahead of those pesky Lambrettas.

I then drove it down a trench on the main runway at RAF Oakington (who left that there?) one summer night at about midnight, taking a short cut home without lights, so as not to be seen. That didn't do it a lot of good although I kept running it for a few more months, including a rather nasty accident when a learner driver shot out of a side road and collided with my pillion passenger's leg, breaking it and causing what became known, by his granny, as the 'Little bone disaster'. This featured in a painting by Martin Heap, the passenger, which I still have. (Wish I still had the LE too – NCE 763 if anyone knows its whereabouts.)

I started to think about a bigger bike, and a school friend of mine, one Aidan Jones, with whom I have sadly lost touch, the son of the vicar of Whittlesford, near Cambridge. His elder brother Christopher had abandoned an old BSA in a shed in the vicarage garden. Martin and I went to look at it and over tea with the charmingly eccentric family negotiated the price of £6. I went back a few days later having persuaded another friend to borrow his father's van and we collected the bike. Whist loading up, the vicar brought out another cardboard box with some bits of motorbike in it and added it to the load. (Aha – see later)

The bike was a non-runner but appeared to be an M21. My father was appalled, thinking that no 16-year-old should be allowed to have a 600cc bike and refused from that day to give any practical or financial assistance to get it running. Somehow or another I managed to get it going with very limited pocket money, mainly because spares could be obtained from a chap called 'The rough diamond' who sold bits from the back garden of his council house in Cambridge for a few pence.

I then rode the bike for many years, including in spring 1968 going for a biology field trip near Betys-y-Coed in North Wales. I decided that to get all my clobber there a sidecar would be the answer. I heard about one in Girton, near Cambridge and went out to see it. It seemed perfect for the job and was for sale for £2, which I could just afford.

It was attached to a gold coloured plunger A10 and the bloke said "why detach it, you can have the whole lot for £5". A bargain, but I didn't have £5; which I always regretted. Anyway the sidecar, a Watsonian double adult which I still have, was duly hitched up and eventually I set out for Wales. I went via Manchester so that I could visit an old girlfriend and then on to the mountains of Snowdonia.

BUYING HEAD GASKETS IN BULK

The trip was not without incident. I had, to the best of my ability, serviced the bike before starting, including adjusting the magneto points, which appeared to have no gap. The bike then ran like an old dog so five miles out from Cambridge I stopped at the side of the road, closed the gap up and proceeded in much better form. I never did understand that magneto.

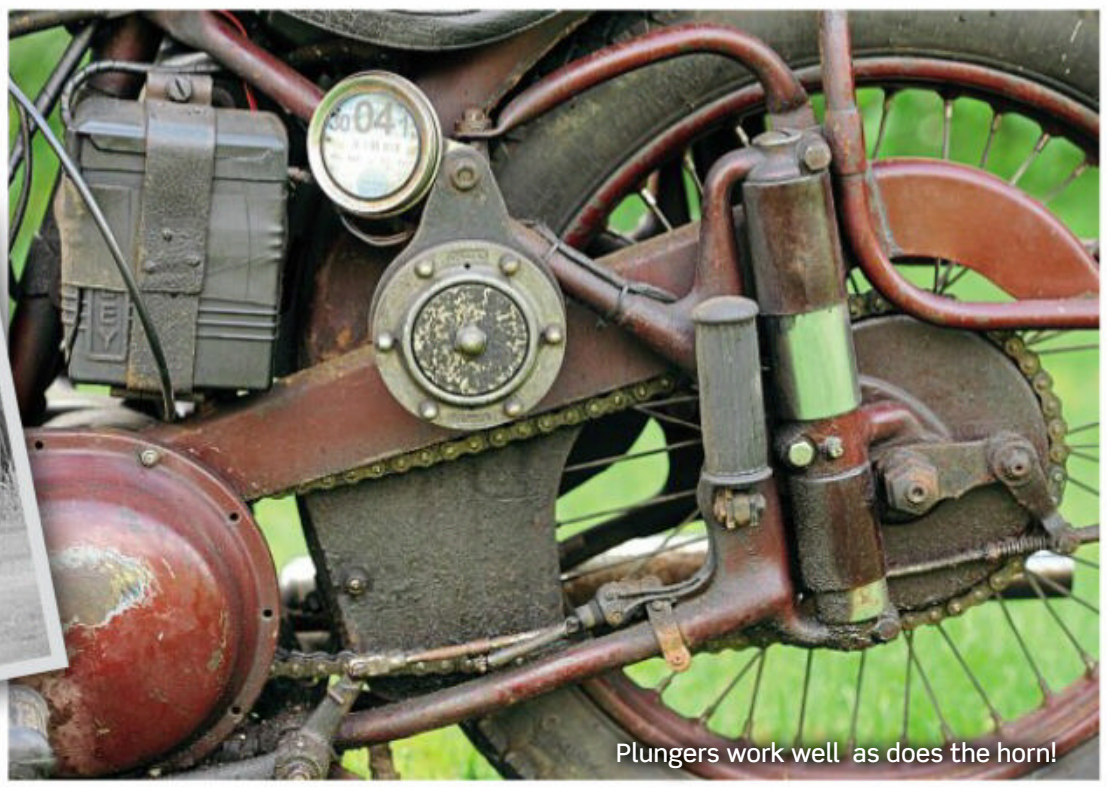
I went round the Leicester ring road which was full of potholes and managed to break the leaf spring of the sidecar on a particularly nasty one. This worried me for a bit but I found a block of wood and some steel wire and patched it up well enough to last for many months. A more frequent problem which continued on a regular basis was blowing the cylinder head gasket. I used to carry a stock of them bought in bulk from Pride and Clarke when funds allowed. I had a lovely little shallow handled socket set which enabled me to take the 10 bolts out of the head and replace the gasket without even taking the tank off. I think I got it down to about 15 minutes in the end even when halfway up mount Snowdon.

Inevitably I thought it would be nice to go a bit faster

John likes to keep his vehicles, like his Series 1 Land Rover and Sunbeam

"I then abused the poor old Velocette by getting it to go as fast as possible and exceeding the recommended maximum speed, clearly shown inside the toolbox lid, of 50mph. Well, you had to keep ahead of those pesky Lambrettas."

A lifetime of memories


Plungers work well as does the horn!

Is Molly John's time machine?

OHV engine a nice surprise after the sidevalve

than the 60mph or so I could get out of the M21. I looked in the cardboard box given to me by the vicar when I collected the bike and lo and behold (in true vicar vocabulary) it was most of an M33 engine. Not only that but the engine number was that of the original bike which was recorded in the old green logbook. It was the original engine of what had started life as an M33 in 1952! I assumed more or less correctly that a 500cc ohv engine would go quicker than a 600cc sv, so work commenced.

The cylinder head was missing so back to the rough diamond and his infallible spares service and a replacement head was had for £1. The bottom end seemed okay but the bore was rusty so I took it to a very well respected engineering firm in Cambridge where they rebored the barrel to suit a new piston they supplied. I didn't realize for several decades that they had not done this properly and it caused endless grief in years to come.

OH, THE LIFE OF A STUDENT

Unfortunately the old carb wouldn't fit the new engine, so I had to go to my dad's lab where they had a lathe and machine up a spacer to make it work. A 'rough diamond' Monobloc completed the modernization programme. All the rest was as taken off the M21 engine. When finally reassembled it started up and I was over the moon! My first engine rebuild – albeit badly done.

The problem was that even after running in, the engine would seize after about 10 miles, even of gentle running. By this time I had gone to university in London and 10 miles was usually enough to get me about. The clutch continued to be a nightmare and I tried everything to get it to work better.

If you had any oil at all in the primary chaincase it would get in the clutch and cause it to slip, but with no oil the primary chain would wear out in no time even if, as was always popular in the household, you boiled it in those special tins of linklife.

Everyday problems continued but were regarded as part of life. One night after a party in Catford, the seat pan broke and collapsed onto the regulator causing total lack of lights for the return journey to Highbury. I had to get home standing on the footrests the whole way.

Cash was always lacking as a student and everything was run on a shoestring. I needed new tyres at some point and didn't know how to afford them. A neighbour knocked on my door one day with the great opening line: " I ride a Matchless". Turned out he had been riding a Matchless G11 but had blown the engine up. He sold me the complete bike for £5 with two good tyres! Out of trouble again. I subsequently traded in the wrecked but complete G11 for a beautifully restored one which I still have, complete with the bent con rod from the original engine.

The sidecar had been detached and cluttered up my dad's garage, so I fitted a huge home-made rear carrier and could get five bags of shopping on it from Sainsburys in Chapel Market. But after many years the usual requirements for four-wheeled transport took over and 'Molly' (named so because of the registration MOL) was relegated to the front garden under a tarpaulin with the G11 as company. Various Sunbeam Talbots, an MG YB and a series 1 Land Rover bought for £20 in a jumble sale filled the transport needs and are still with me, now restored. Molly rusted away under the tarp until at some point a friend and work colleague of mine decided she should have a complete restoration and we made the near fatal mistake of dismantling the whole bike prior to shot blasting and powder coating. I even decided to go for a green colour since maroon had never been my favourite.

As so often happens, things changed. My colleague

and I both changed jobs, we lived too far apart and the project fizzled out. Molly returned to Highbury but at least in a garage this time and sat there for about 20 years with most of her innards unidentified in boxes. I moved to Norfolk and finally had more space. Molly was moved up here and new plans were laid.

MOLLY GETS REBORN

At around this time I met my great friend and colleague Neville who has featured in *Classic Bike Guide* many times. He started work with me and we restored quite a few old straight-eight Daimlers, the Series 1 Land Rover, a Mk3 sunbeam Talbot and lots of other silly things, like an Opperman Motocart (look that up on Google if you want a laugh).

Neville rashly volunteered to restore Molly, albeit with conditions. One, it would be an oily rag restoration. Two, the original paint, and therefore colour, would be retained. Three, not all the internals would be totally original. Seemed reasonable to me so off we went. He tackled the various boxes and started to put things together like a jigsaw puzzle.

First of all what remained of the engine was stripped down and very quickly the seizing up problem was explained. The piston was far too tight in the bore, maybe machined to modern car standards but not old, air-cooled motorcycle tolerances. I was relieved that it was not my schoolboy ineptitude that had caused the problem. A further rebore and correct piston put that right. Neville found a few other problems that he put right, such as excessive end float on the crank – a concept beyond my consciousness when I was 16 and 40 years ago.

The gearbox seemed fine and was left alone but the troublesome clutch provided a beard-scratching dilemma for some time. In the end we decided to dump it and while we considered the options of Triumph clutches etc, we decided that since it would not be original anyway, we might as well go all the way and put a Bob Newby clutch in with a belt drive.

ABOVE: A handsome John with Molly just after the 'Little bone disaster' incident

BOTTOM: The M33 would be just another M33 if it had been restored; as it is, it's Molly, the M33

Bob was really helpful and although he had not done an M33 before, he adapted some bits to suit and it all fitted beautifully. It is probably the best improvement we made. The primary case fits back on with just a quarter-of-an-inch spacer and the whole thing is invisible from outside.

The other great improvement was the fitting of an Amal Premier Concentric carburettor. For the first time in my 50 years of ownership, Molly will now tick over evenly from cold and starting is almost guaranteed first kick. The reconditioned mag from Dragonfly Motorcycles probably helps too. A new wiring loom and regulator got the electrics in a much better state.

The paintwork, as agreed, is with the same paint as it left the factory, although with a few more dents and scratches. The treatment has literally been oily rag, which suits its life perfectly.

The wheels were rebuilt and new bearings fitted, new tyres and new fork bushes installed. The rear plungers were freed up and now go up and down! The dynamo was cleaned up and checked – and now for the first time charges a battery so the lights don't go dim on tickover. Brakes are original and work… well perhaps as well as they ever did.

She has now done more than 5000 miles and runs better and more reliably than ever. She is almost my everyday transport, and although I have several faster and more exotic bikes, she is definitely my favourite. After all, we've had some great adventures together, are almost the same age (within a year) and have been together for 53 years! CBG

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Suzuki T250 & T350

BY STEVE COOPER

This month we look at a pair of exceedingly good Suzuki twins

SUZUKI'S FIRST SPORTS 250CC TWO-STROKE twin massively rocked the motorcycle world. This was arguably the machine that foretold how many, many callow youths would learn their craft. Variously sold as the T20, Super Six (UK and Euro) or X6 (USA), the bike confirmed the firm's status as a front line manufacturer.

Then, for the 1969 model year Suzuki launched the T250. The new machine shared much of the T20's DNA yet at the same time addressed various issues inherent in the older model. It would prove to be another instant success and by the time the bike was dropped in favour of the GT250, Suzuki had released numerous 250 analogues along with a faux 350 that expanded the range to the max.

THE BIKES

If you have a successful design there's no need to reinvent the wheel, so Suzuki simply refined what they already had. The engine remained a three bearing crank, utilising the supremely efficient CCI/Posi-Force oil injection system. Changes to the clutch and oil pump were the main and obvious revisions but a whole lot more had also been carried out in the light of dealer feedback. The greatest changes were the new bike's aesthetics; gone were the chrome tank panels, rubber knee pads, painted guards and fork leg lowers, external fork springs and a whole lot more. The new range was visually much more dynamic utilising a panoply of candy paint schemes augmented by distinctive graphics and dramatic badges.

Looking to maximise market appeal just as the fad for street scramblers was on the wane, Suzuki offered a one year only (1970) option on the T250/II of high pipes that ended in curiously flared outlets. Recognising just how successful the T20's big brother, the T305, had been, a similar ruse was employed, this time taking the engine out to its maximum capacity via a 61mm bore. The 'all new' T350 Rebel was actually only 315ccs but the missing cubes had little impact on the bike's performance and it was rapidly discovered it was something of a Q machine able to embarrass much bigger machines.

The 1969 T250 was something of an oddball and seemed to have elements of both the T20 and T250 about it, before the bike's profile was finalised the following year.

Owning one now

There's precious little reason not to home a T250/350 now if you're keen to get into earlier Japanese strokers. Incomplete project bikes are always likely to be the proverbial millstone so avoid unless you can easily source the missing parts; a complete non-runner is arguably a much better bet. That said if you have the cash, most of what you might need is out there to varying degrees. A complete paint kit of oil and fuel tank plus side panel, painted and with badges is yours for £800 should you wish. Enterprising individuals have sourced oil pump rebuild kits, a Japanese firm have remade the pistons and rings along with con rod kits. eBay UK currently seems to be littered with NOS pistons and rings and its American cousin can supply Wiseco aftermarket kits for the 350.

On the negative side, speedo and tachos are hard to source and some model year specific switch gear is also rare now. Mudguards are often hard to source and expensive when found. Many of the seat foams were natural rubber based and become sponges if the cover is damaged, leading to rotted out seat bases.

Options and choices

The range ran 1969 to 1972 thereby offering four model years and given that both the 250 and 350 were volume market machines there's a lot to choose from even now. The only caveat here would be the T250II high pipe model; if you have your heart set on one of these ensure it has those unique exhausts. 1970 – 1972 offers three model years with generally two colour options per market. There really is no significant differences between the T250s other than aesthetics and peripheral fittings such as passenger grab rails and even these may differ country to country. The TT250 is rare bird in the UK and it's worth knowing that it's possible to produce a 'reproduction version' via panels from a GT250. Such hybrids aren't automatically easy to spot. The 350 version splits neatly into the 69/70 round tank models and the 71/72 square tank versions with, again little in the way of intrinsic difference other than appearance. It's the later 71/72 models that often seem to fetch top dollar yet the earlier versions do have a unique look and are arguably worth tracking down simply for their distinctive styling.

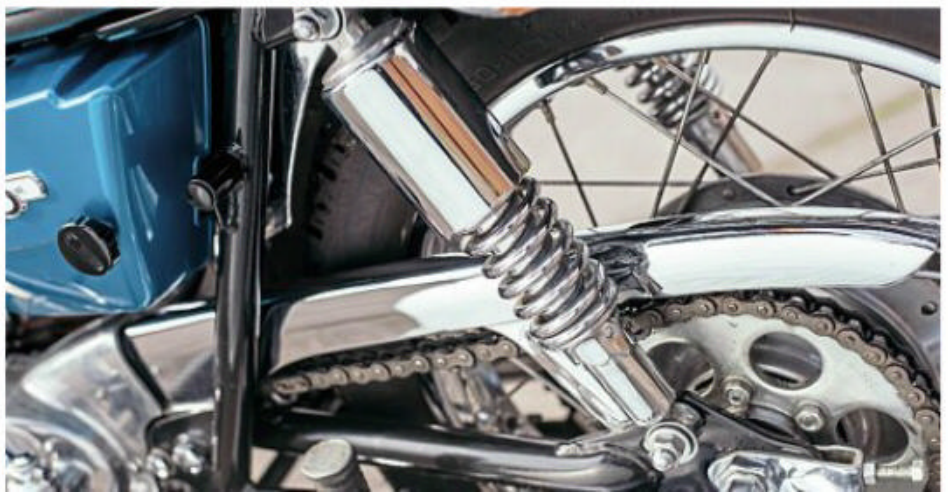
From that point on until 1972 nothing much changed until Suzuki once again played around with the styling. For that one year you could have the organic rounded look of the T250J or the more cobby profile of what was called the TT250, with its cuboid tank and boxy panels. Typical of the Hamamatsu firm, the stylists were given free rein to try new ideas and so they'd already been playing with the looks of the 350 a year earlier in 1971 when the new Rebel replaced the old Rebel. As an aside, both the later T350s and the TT250 featured cylinder heads with substantially angled fins that were totally unlike anything in the entire Suzuki range. The new look Rebel's typing was uncannily like that of the TT250 but even more changes were afoot.

1973 saw the introduction of the GT250 which was essentially a T250 with a Ram-Air cylinder head, a disc front brake and the self-same boxy panels from the 1972 TT250 and 1971 T350, just painted differently. Sadly the bigger twin had had its day as corporate dictats saw it dropped in favour of a 380 triple that was heavier, slower and thirstier. Those that know their Suzuki two-stroke twins inside out reckon the T250/350s were the zenith of the firm's welter weights.

THE RIDE

These Suzuki stroker twins are some of the best of the era and arguably strike the right balance between technical details, performance and ease of use. The bikes are relatively light, handle well enough and feature a motor that's robustly engineered. For a two-stroke they're not highly strung and are more than content to pootle along on a whiff of throttle in urban situations. Open the taps and they'll happily canter on at a decent rate then cruise without coughing or surging; give them a tad more gas, get them on pipe and they become superbly enthusiastic. That this and more is consistently available without issue or the utilisation of discs or reed valves is a phenomenal achievement from a piston ported motor and only underlines just how good the engine's flow dynamics and carburation are.

Chassis-wise the bikes are of their time but



Faults and foibles

Being well engineered there are no inherent problems with the any of the models and most issues are largely likely to be attributable to lack of maintenance and/or owner abuse. One strange quirk of the design is that the oil pump drives off the back of the clutch. As the drive for the tacho then comes off the oil pump if the needle of the former doesn't move, check the flow of oil in the lines to ensure the pump is working. These pre-moulded devices carry swaged-in banjos at either end which can work loose over time allowing air into the junction. Fortunately it's possible to repair a joint with a low viscosity superglue and a suitable polyolefin primer. All Suzuki strokers feature check valves in their oil lines that stop the oil tank disgorging its contents into the crankcases. If these fail you'll either need to track down NOS replacement lines or look for aftermarket valves online.

substantially better than many that had gone before them. The frames are robust, the brakes substantially more than just adequate and there's a decent degree of comfort on offer. With a sensible seat height the machines are accessible to shorter riders but there's nothing diminutive about the bikes. If you were nit-picking some might take issue with the high handlebars but these are easily changed. Another design quirk are the foot pegs that are mounted above the silencers which gives a subtly different leg/knee position, but it's neither unduly odd or uncomfortable – just different.

Either the 250 or 350 will happily take you wherever you want go regardless of distance; they're most emphatically not a one trick pony. Back in the day folk toured on these bikes racking up huge distances. Rider fatigue is more likely to curtail your adventures than anything else! CBG

"The range ran 1969 to 1972, thereby offering four model years and given that both the 250 and 350 were volume market machines there's a lot to choose from:

Considered upgrades

Every example available will now be approaching, or over, half a century old – let that sink in a moment. Some pattern points are simply horrendous quality, OEM NOS examples can sell for £40 for one set and pair of genuine condensers will take £30 out of your wallet. Therefore, if the generator windings are dead or dying, a modern aftermarket system is arguably a better bet than a rewind in the long term, especially when you factor in the new solid state voltage regulator/rectifier that comes with the kit. A fork service with modern oil never goes amiss and any pattern rear shock absorbers you buy now are likely to be substantially better than what is already on the bike. A new pair of tyres will transform the bike's handling and there's no need to get sniffy over brands as most modern rubber on sale in the UK is decent quality.

The race bike

If you needed reassurance as to the reliability of the design, know this – in 1972 Jim Eastmure entered a stock T350 in the Castrol Six Hour Production Race at Amaroo Park in the 500 class, taking on not only Kawasaki H1 500s but also the all-new H2 750, RD350 and TX750s from Yamaha, Ducati GT750s, Honda CB750/4s etc.

After two-and-a-half hours Eastmure was in the lead and at the end of six gruelling hours he'd won the race outright, along with the 500 category... or thought he had! The 315cc stroker twin had embarrassed many of the teams who'd enjoyed quasi-official factory support and company pride was at stake. Complaints formally logged, the scrutineers were called in. Jim Eastmure was stripped of his win because the T350's horn had been removed!

The engine was then stripped down and subsequently said to be running non-production pistons which were actually nothing more than stock units that had been matched, flowed and balanced. The win was awarded to a Kawasaki 750 triple which has also been modified to stop it pinking and eating pistons, but no one seemed too bothered about that.

A year later, Jim was back on the same bike but this time with the horn fitted and a rebuilt engine. A Z1 900 DOHC won the unlimited category but the T350 Rebel took the 500 title with 234 laps, the same as it had achieved the previous year, proving beyond doubt just how capable the Suzuki really was!

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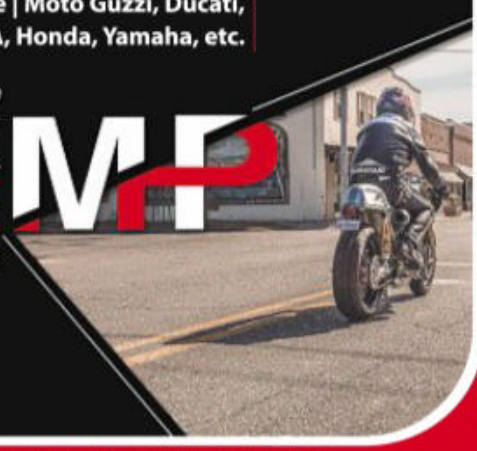

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Formation flying

Tom Herron leads Barry Sheene at Brands Hatch, in 1979. It was the Transatlantic trophy races and while the US team was without Pat Hennen and Kenny Roberts, the British team didn't have it all their own way.

Sheene may be in behind Pat in the photograph of the first race, taken by Nick Nicholls, but he would soon end up in front, and by the end would have chased down leader American Mike Baldwin. The second race saw a massive crash for Herron, but while hurting badly, lined up for the third race of the day, where he managed an heroic second place – in a helmet he borrowed from Barry!

Tom Herron showed tremendous skill and promise as a rider and 1979 had started well with a factory Suzuki ride and two thirds and a fourth coming from the first four GPs. But Tom was a roads rider at heart, and the North West 200 and TT races were where he made his money. So after badly injuring his hand and burning himself at the Spanish Grand Prix, he travelled home to Northern Ireland to compete at the North West 200, where he held the lap record. But in the main race of the day, he was to be fatefully injured in a crash at Juniper, the last corner. It was a terrible day for everyone, as Brian Hamilton and Frank Kennedy were also to be taken from accidents that day.

But Barry Sheene, who was taken by illness in 2003, and Tom Herron will both always be remembered for their skill on the track, as well as Barry's charm and personality and Tom's kindness in the pits to other riders; and both as great bike racing fans' favourites. CBG

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BRITISH BIKE GUIDE

PART THREE

This month we continue our look at the British bikes Norton and Panther

NORTON

Where do we start? The evocative name that carries a surcharge. After struggling to re-create their pre-Second World War success, Norton became an AMC company from 1953, and moved from its Birmingham base to the London AMC works in 1963 as part of the parent company's struggle to stay afloat.

It built a wide range of machines including sidevalve sloggers, ohc singles and ohv twins. Famously better handling than the Triumph competition, although many riders prefer the Triumph's perky power delivery: and always more expensive than BSA, AJS or Matchless equivalents.

Following the AMC crash of 1966, the new Norton Villiers concern concentrated on twins, launching the Commando in 1967 and relying on variants on this theme until production ceased in 1977.

A revived successor company produced several hundred twin-rotor, Wankel-engined machines between 1983 and 1992, which have become accepted as classics despite their strangeness. We'll forget the latest incarnation of the brand, for now. Spares supply is excellent for the classic twins, reasonable for the singles; likewise for the rotaries despite the demise of the factory. An excellent owners' club, which supplies an increasing range of obscure spares.

16H

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

A most un-Norton-like slogger, with less performance than a modern 125. They do have much charm though, and some riders prefer them to BSA's equivalent M20, which was also a favourite with Second World War dispatch riders. Used to be found with family chair attached and completely worn out, now usually observed at military reenactment meetings.

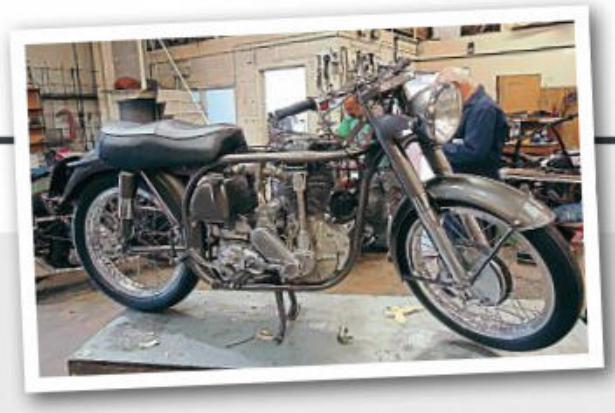
Prices:
low £3000 || high £6500
(military models more)

N15CS

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

Norton Atlas engine in a Matchless chassis and off-road clothes makes for a wild, heavy early trail bike. Mainly sold in the US as 'desert sleds'. Loads of noise, vibes and excitement. Strangely, the Atlas engine shakes rather less in the Matchless's lugged frame than in Norton's all-welded Featherbed. Visual stunners, and with on/off road performance to match.

Prices:
low £7000 || high £15,000



Model 30 (International)

490cc ohc single || 360lb || 60mpg || 95mph || 1946-58

Cammy sports single that offered similar performance to the 88 twin but required much more effort to achieve it. Good looks, class and oil leaks fail to justify the high prices. Kamshaft kudos is invaluable, however,

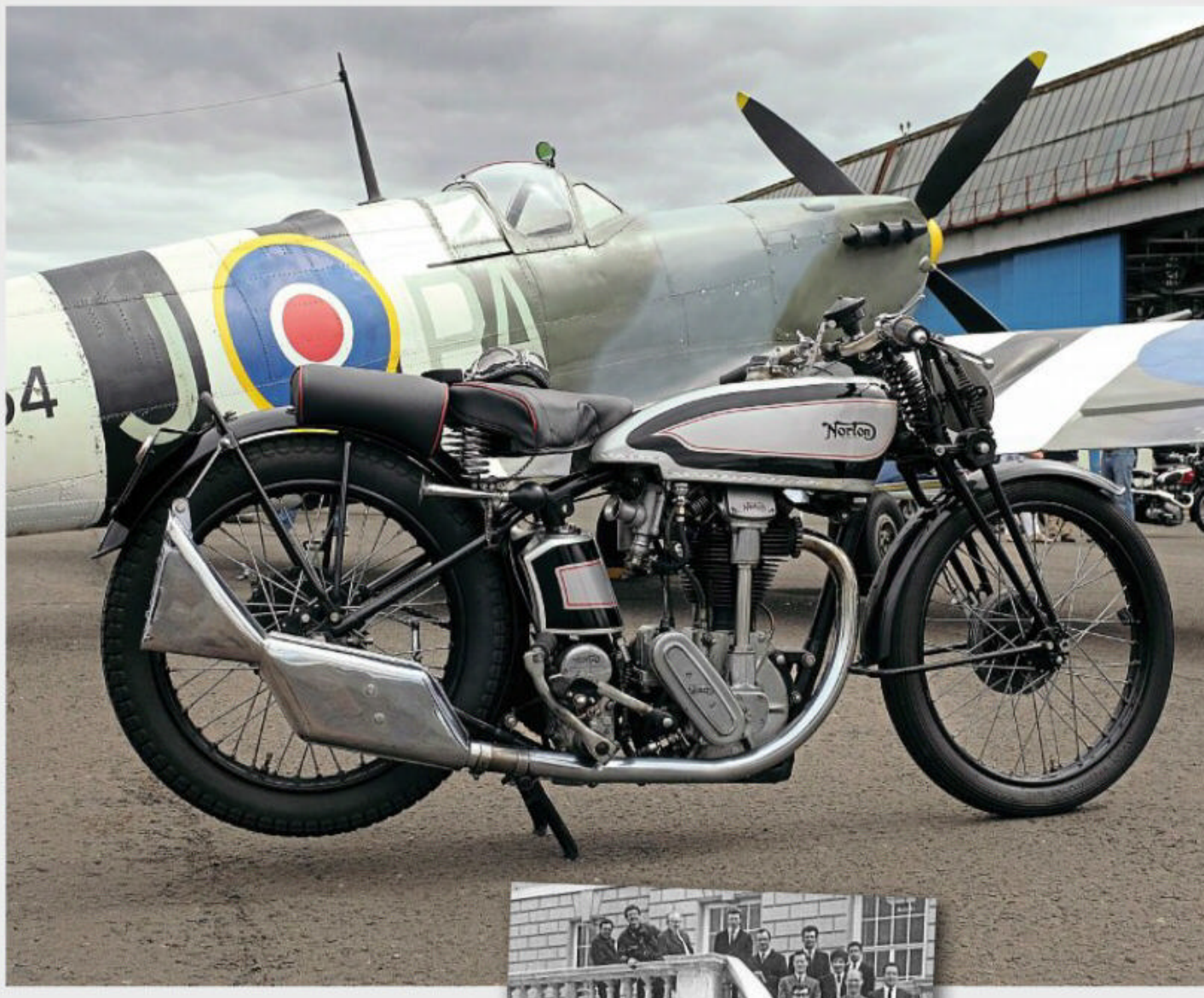
Prices:
low £18,000 || high £35,000

Model 40 (International)

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

Fussy camshaft single, aka the international, a distant road-going relative of the racing Manx models. Featherbed bikes are probably the best, but are ludicrously expensive. Experts are out there; identifying them is rarely easy. Parts are expensive.

Prices:
low £20,000 || high £30,000 and more...

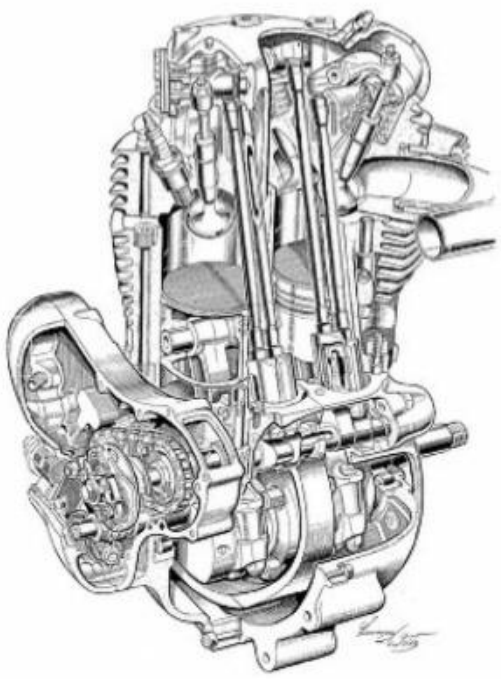


Commando

745cc ohv twin || 450lb || 55mpg || 125mph || 1968-73
828cc ohv twin || 450lb || 50mpg || 120mph || 1973-77

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £12,500



P11/P11A/ Ranger 750

745cc ohv twin || 400lb || 45mpg || 110mph || 1965-69

Definitive US desert racer, with the Atlas lump in Matchless G85CS scrambler cycle parts making a beast of a bike. Very rare and very fine street scrambler. Take care when buying, as the frame can be delicate around the footrest mounts, and remember that the bike's Teledraulic fork does not accept the Norton 8in anchor.

Prices:
low £7000 || high £11,000

Model 50

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

Gentle trad Brit single with nice manners and gentle performance. Post 1959 models are the most expensive, with the famous Featherbed frame, decent alternator electrics and good looks, but the earlier non-Featherbed machines are charming, much cheaper and have a better riding position. Very few Featherbed M50s survive, most were turned into Tritons...

Prices:
low £4500 || high £7500

650SS/Mercury

646cc ohv twin || 420lb || 50mpg || 110mph || 1960-69

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £8500

Model 7

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

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £8000

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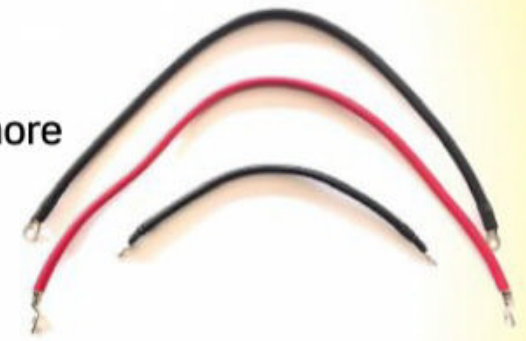
* 9 tooth pinion provides a 15.78 gear reduction ratio for an 11% improvement in torque over the 10 tooth prestolite with 14.2 gear reduction ratio
* Net weight 2.16kg which is approximately 2Lbs lighter than the stock unit
* Completely bolt-in interchange...no modifications required.

This starter motor is best used with starter leads that are designed to take more power which are thicker than original

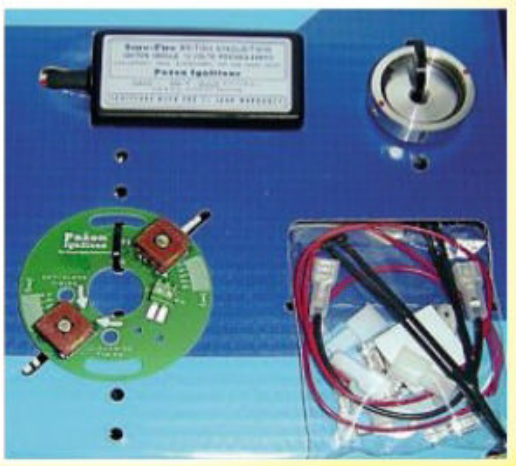


065909CBG POSITIVE – RED £10

065910CBG NEGATIVE - BATTERY TO SOLENOID £12

065911CBG NEGATIVE - SOLENOID TO STARTER £17

We also recommend the use of a heavy duty battery, we can no longer post out batteries so get a YTX20 locally. If your bike is as it came out of the factory, then that is great, but if you have fitted a Boyer ignition, we recommend switching to our Pazon unit which works on much lower volts



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

Stretched 88 with a little more speed and vibration. One of the best of the entire Dominator series. Shared the same cycle parts as the other Featherbed twins and developed with them. Single carb, gained an alternator in 1958 and the slimmer slimline Featherbed in 1959. Very popular, too, so prices will continue to rise.

Prices:
low £5500 || high £8500

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

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

Prices:
low £15,000 || high £30,000

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

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

Prices:
low £4000 || high £8000

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

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £8000

E52 Mk2 & Model 50 Mk2 1964-66
Matchless machines with Norton badges and bearing no resemblance to 'real' ES2s. Built for some odd marketing reason for a short time before the AMC collapse. Very rare now; price as AJS 350/500, plus invisible rarity Norton factor.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £5000

Model 18/ES2
490cc ohv single || 380lb || 60mpg || 75mph || 1947-62

Norton's trad Brit single went on for years. An average performer in all areas until the Featherbed frame gave it brilliant handling for 1959. Again, it's a pleasant bike with character, but a lot of the Featherbed ES2s were converted into Tritons. Opinion suggests that the M18 and ES2 are among the best trad British singles of them all. Spares availability are getting better. The M18 (1945-54) is essentially the plunger ES2 less the plungers; i.e. it retained the earlier rigid frame but used the Roadholder front end and worth more.

Prices:
low £3500 high £7500

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

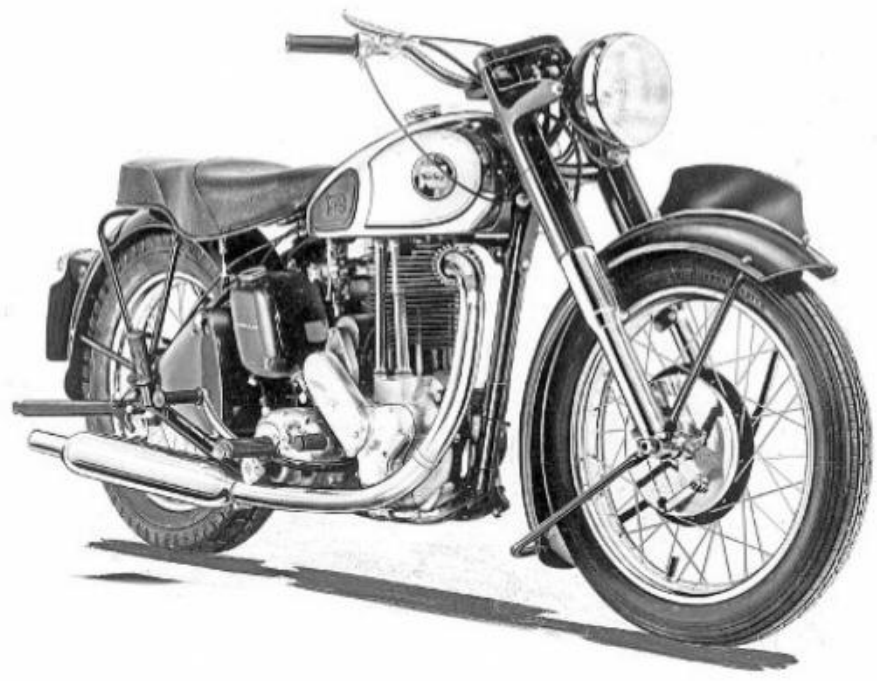
Rare electric start version of the Navigator with a few more ccs and indicators. The best of the lightweights and pretty civilised for 1963. Provided the electrical system's in decent condition, the starter is reliable enough too. Light and agile, with great steering and stopping. It even has indicators. Prices are rising, reflecting the Electra's appeal to older riders looking for light weight, good brakes and almost reliable electric starting, uncommon in British bikes.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6500

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

Monster 600 single intended for the chair-pullers and with little to commend it except rarity and the Norton name on the tank. No more on-road performance than the 500. Suffix 'S' stands for Sprung (not Sports, silly) and 'R' for Rigid. Very long stroke engine makes it a master at climbing mountains as well as hard to start.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £4750



Interpol 2

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

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

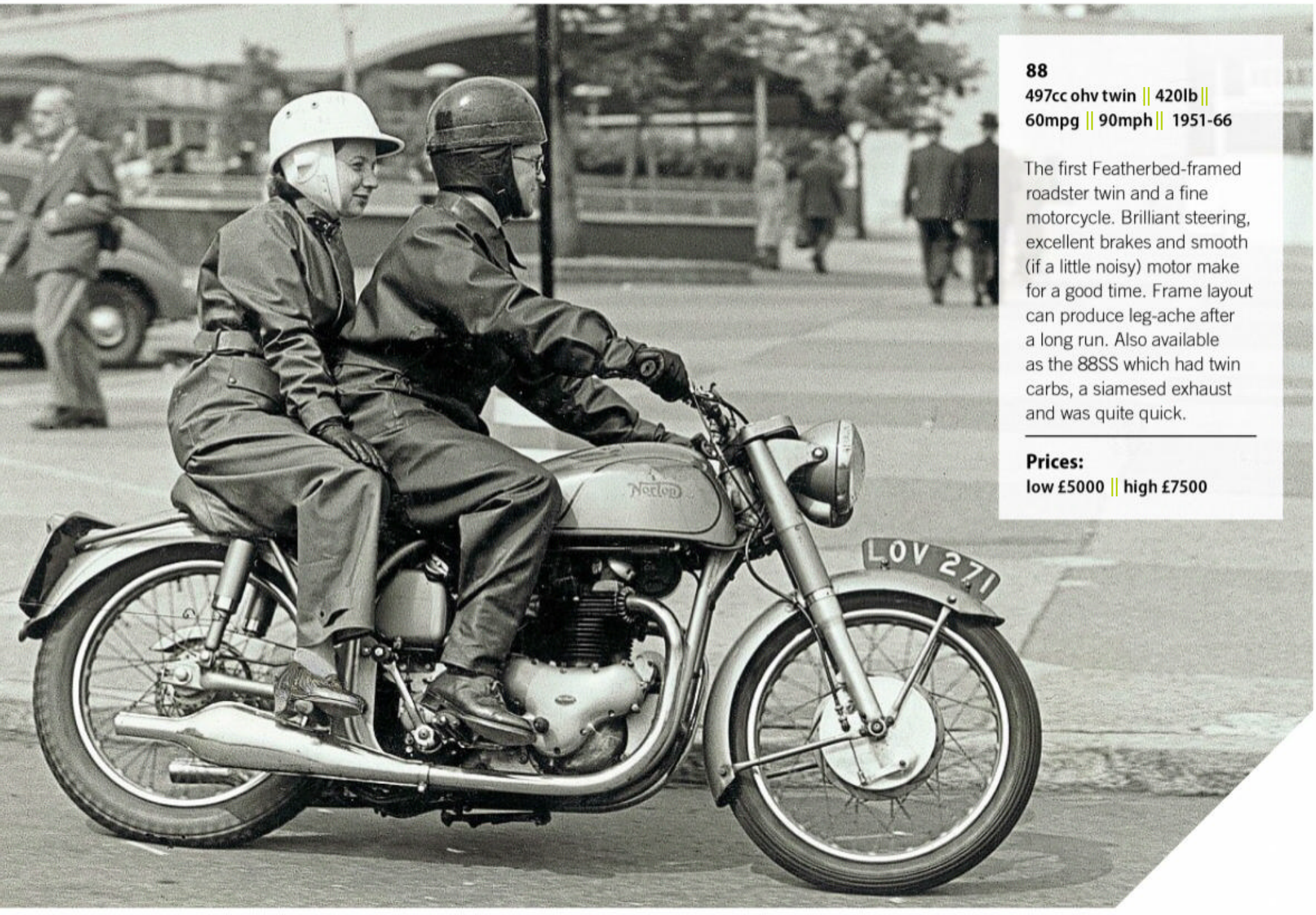
Prices:
low £4500 || high £6000

Jubilee

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

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

Prices:
low £1700 || high £3000



88

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

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

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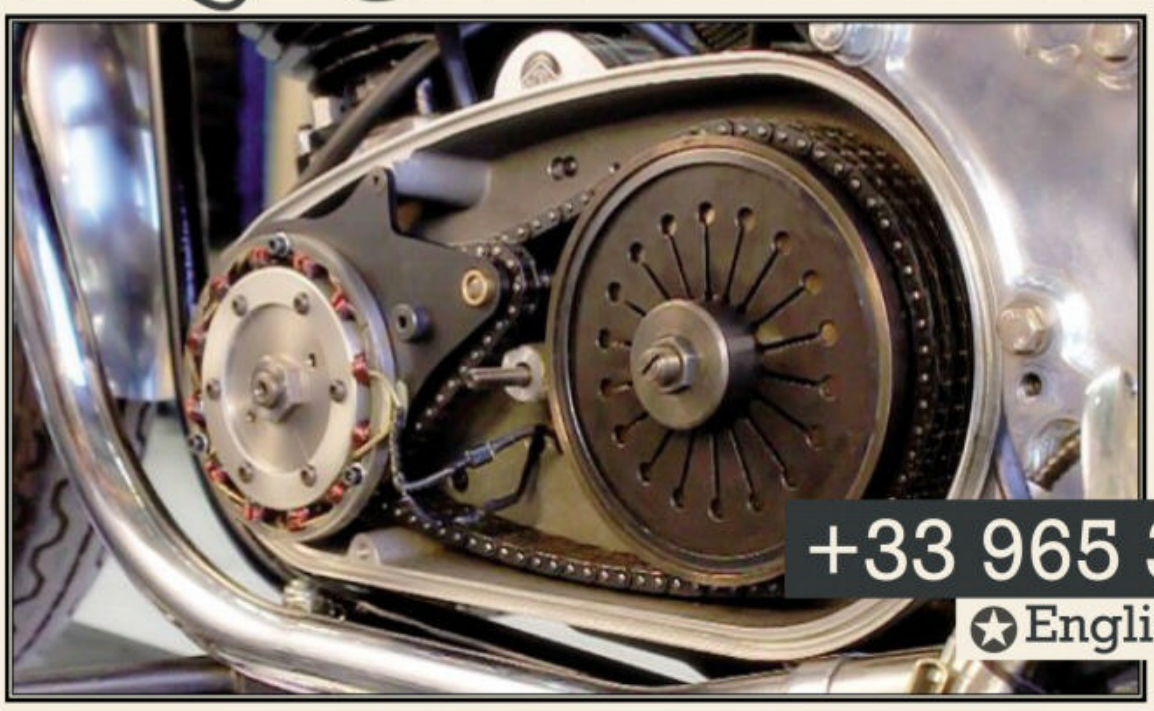

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Commander
588cc l/c twin rotary || 498lb || 40mpg || 110mph || 1988-93

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

Prices:
low £5000 || high £7500

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

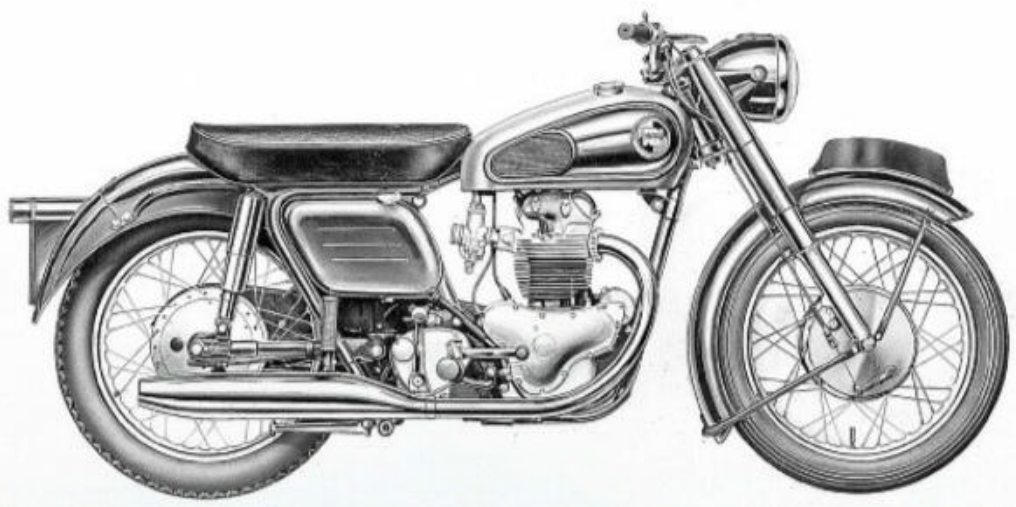
Enlarged and more useful Jubilee with Roadholder forks and an 8in front brake. Enough performance for cruising the byways and excellent handling. Expensive (for a lightweight) but wieldy and manageable. Handsome too, in a baby-Dommi way, and quick enough, if not fast.

Prices:
low £2500 || high £4000

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

The first civilian rotary Norton. Neat traditional style and unique performance. One hundred and one built and sold. Check that it really is a Classic and not a re-upholstered police Interpol 2. Some spares are hard to find, such as tachometers.

Prices:
low £7000 || high £11,000



Model 77
Rare twin from 1956; a 99 engine in a non-Featherbed swinging arm bicycle very similar to that used on the same-year ES2 single. Comfortable, calm bike to ride, and intended mainly for sidecar use. US riders could buy the Nomad, a desert sled version of this machine with great styling and better performance.

Prices:
low £3500 || high £5500
(Nomad a lot more)

PANTHER

Built by Phelon and Moore in Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire, Panther motorcycles inspire huge loyalty in their owners and seem to spur them on to incredible feats. Post-war, as well as the galaxy-spanning big slopers which featured forward thinking such as engines as stressed members and wet sumps, P&M built a range of lighter four-stroke singles and a range of two-stroke lightweights powered by the ubiquitous Villiers engines and featuring Earles forks. They also imported the Terrot scooter in a vain tilt at the scooter market. Panthers have little focus on performance but great charm and pull well. An active and completely eccentric owners' club adds to the fun of ownership. Spares okay and owners helpful.

Models 65/75

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

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

Prices:
low £2250 || high £4000

Model 100

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

Intended as a chair-puller and looking quite odd without one, they have immense reliability, leak hugely and run on for years. Built for durability rather than looks. Supremely charming to own. One of Brit biking's great characters, they famously inspire remarkable devotion in their owners. Rigid machines fetch the highest prices, owing to unique style, etc.

Prices:
low £4000 || high £6500

Model 120

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

Enlarged from Model 100 but little different. "Notably more troubled than the Model 100," said historian Steve Wilson. Some spares are rare, but the owners' club can usually help.

Prices:
low £3000 || high £6500

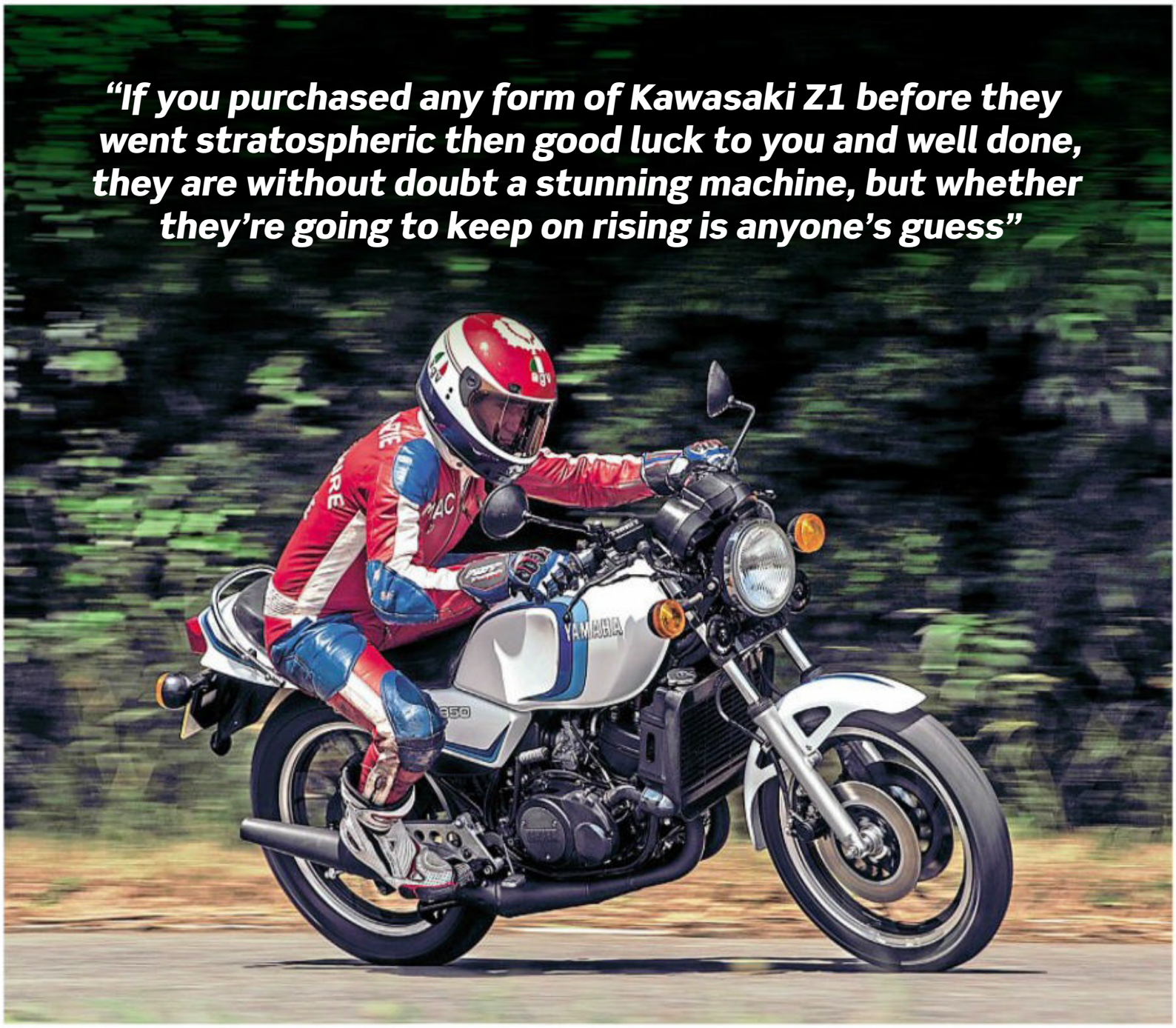
The big question – looking at motorcycles as investments

Steve looks at whether our classics really are a licence to print money, or are the fly-by-night investors ruining our passion?

WORDS BY STEVE COOPER

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN ASLEEP FOR THE LAST 10 or so years you'll have witnessed the potentially worrying trend that is – motorcycles as a form of investment. Although, to a fair degree, bikes and cars have almost constantly been perceived as having some potential as speculatory assets, the trend has somewhat snowballed since the financial crash of 2008. When classic bike dealers start advertising machines as 'inflation proof assets' more than a few greybeards raise their eyebrows towards the heavens with a knowing glint in their eyes; but why? Simply because we've been here before in the not too distant past.

Sometime ago during the yuppie era, the so-called smart money could, apparently, see the writing on the wall and those in the know began buying high end classic cars rather than investing with banks, playing the stock markets etc. And those self-same smart arses also managed to move their wheeled assets on to someone else just before the world went into financial meltdown, doubling, trebling or even quadrupling their outlay. Unfortunately far too many punters who'd grabbed onto the coat tails of these wise guys didn't have the market place nous, the inside



"If you purchased any form of Kawasaki Z1 before they went stratospheric then good luck to you and well done, they are without doubt a stunning machine, but whether they're going to keep on rising is anyone's guess"

tips or the weather eye before the financial storm broke. The end result was that a large proportion who'd invested midway through the programme found themselves having paid over the odds for a mediocre vehicle the value of which rapidly plummeted like a stolen bike into a canal. Caveat emptor (buyer beware) etc. but if you had lost money on a second rate, 1950s, Daimler saloon, mediocre 1960s Jaguar or 1970s Lancia such trite warnings are of little help.

In the three or so decades since, someone has spotted another niche in the market which just so happens to be us – classic bike fans. Yes, agreed, some in our ranks have always turned a pretty penny at spotting potential value, but these are the folk who dabble in Brough Superiors, Vincents, early Harleys, Hendersons et al.

What we're now being force-fed is the line that almost any old motorcycle has the ability to rise in value and there, by default, is a potential investment asset. Excuse me but what sort of foolishness is this? We journos are unquestionably guilty of overworking the 'classic' tag yet it doesn't automatically confer value upon machines thus labelled as aspirational artefacts so please bear with me here.

Honda's seminal C50, C70 and C90 step-throughs have seen a rapid increase in value of late; an example that was once worth a few quid is currently fetching at least £1500. So does that mean they too must have investment potential? To date no one I know of is stacking shipping containers to the roof with Honda's finest commuters – but ultimately who knows?

Above left: Brough Superiors have always been more about money than riding

Right: RD350LC fetch good money, but is it for the memories? If so, TIger Cubs and C90s would be a fortune!

And what, pray, confers upon classic iron the hallowed stamp of a money making machine? If you purchased any form of Kawasaki Z1 before they went stratospheric then good luck to you and well done, they are without doubt a stunning machine but whether they're going to keep on rising is anyone's guess. Close on the Mighty Zed's heels is the first true modern superbike aka Honda's CB750/4. Other than the very early 'sand-cast' machines the bike had pretty much languished in the shadow of the Z1 but as we began to ramp up towards its 50th anniversary values suddenly lit up.

Once viewed as a pale version of the original, all UK K2 models began to escalate in value, taking even a heavily patinated example rapidly out of the financial grasp of the average enthusiast.

So Z1s and 750/4s are the must-haves then? Well possibly, but make sure what you're spending the kid's inheritance on is what it purports to be. Did you know that key elements of the Z1s ran date codes on stuff like switch gear and swing arms? And whatever you do, don't fritter your hard earned away on a 750/4 that runs pattern pipes. It's a minefield out there and not only in the Japanese world. Laverda Jotas don't come cheap but it's perfectly possible to trick up a 3C or 3CE to mimic the iconic Italian triple.

Over in the classic British-iron world, similar has been going on for decades. Innocent (naïve?) punters buying BSA B31s that have been elevated to Gold Star status via some creative massaging of key items. Other Smallheath machines similarly, err, transformed, include the Rocket Gold Star twin. As one wag once put it "BSA made some 1500 RGS twins of which 3200 are still known to exist!"

Some perfectly good machines are somehow overlooked, dismissed or simply ignored by those chasing money; Suzukis in particular seem to get a bum steer here. Arguably, two stroke versus four stroke aside, an early GT750 is in no way the inferior of a Honda CB750/4, yet the water-cooled triple has yet to financially mature…why? I've no idea, sorry! And from the same stable the sublime GS750 is everything the Z1 could have been and more, yet prices remain stubbornly low. Even its son, the bomb-proof GS1000, fails to make even halfway decent money, but will it in the future? We can only wait and see.

Above: Gold Stars are worth a lot, but are they going to increase? And make sure it is what it says it is...

Below: This pile of parts won't be much less than a restored bike – you're paying for the identity

Anything, almost anything air-cooled and two-stroke has increased in value by at least a factor of two in the last five-six years. Yamaha RD400s lived for years in the shade of the LC350 yet they've caught up and, in some instances, overtaken Elsie. But who could have foreseen that sea change?

A once £4000-5000 mint 400 is now breasting the five figure winning tape and shows no signs of slowing down. Similarly, the divine 350 YPVS, aka the Power Valve, has suddenly gone nuclear. Yet, strangely, the delicious round tanked RD350s from which all of the above stem from rarely make more than £6k

And how about Kawasaki triples? Even the 250s are making serious, serious, money. So does this increase in stroker value reflect the bikes' popularity back in the day? You'd like to think so but the answer is … not necessarily. Suzuki's GT250 was the bestselling learner bike of its generation but, just like our Honda commuter analogy, no one is stock piling those either ready to cash in on a non-existent buying frenzy.

RARITIES?

Rare should mean valuable surely? After all Coventry Eagle and Montgomery V-twins go for ridiculous sums of cash. Well yes and no; rare doesn't automatically equate to valuable or worthy of investing in. Take Yamaha's gorgeous flawed genius that was the TX750 four-stroke twin. It was plagued with issues to the point where the European importer off-loaded their existing stock into land fill. Any TX750 running now is likely to have had all of its issues sorted yet it's never going to be a rich kid's plaything. Suzuki's offerings, so far pilloried as not investor stock, don't seem to cut the mustard; RE5s are beginning to creep up in value, but they're never going to be a Z1. Closer to home, the much reviled AMC grey porridge isn't ever going to burn holes in wallets even if you own one of the uber-rare and still running examples powered by Mr Vincenzo Piatti's two-stroke engine. No, rare emphatically does not automatically equate to valuable.

COMMON?

So how about popular, surely that must confer desirability? Yamaha's seminal XS650 remains one of Japan's best-selling models, yet its market value remains woefully low. Even the earliest XS1/XS2 models struggle to make the same money as an RD400. Honda's K series 250/350 twins along with the CL analogues were hugely popular back in the day, yet they constantly fail to make good money. The same goes for BSA's Bantam or Triumph's Tiger Cub that look cursed to sit forever in the £1500-£3000 bracket unless they're something really special. So if tiddlers aren't worth investing in and popular doesn't automatically denote sought-after why the hell are Yamaha FS1-E mopeds still making £5000-6000? Yet one more example of how nonsensical the whole shebang is.

Above: Honda CB350 – great bike to ride, parts easy to get and still a bargain compared to a British 350

Below: Kawasaki Z900 – proof that rarity isn't the only key to high prices

It would be very easy and convenient to blame dealers and auction houses for the spiralling costs of classic ownership. Dealers aim to make a profit on every bike they sell and some folk get really piqued that dealers tend to buy stock at below private seller prices and then sell for what looks like top dollar. Surely they're profiteering? Or are they? Every bike they hold in stock is effectively dead money until it's sold. They have running costs and staff wages to cover as well; both of which are often conveniently overlooked by would-be clients. Buyers will expect some form of after sales support or even a warranty so this has to be factored into the equation. The final add-on is the VAT element of the sale which delivers a further 20% from the gross profit. Auction houses (and for that matter the likes of eBay) are also accused of

Above: Yamaha TX750 is rare, very rare, but still not worthy of enormous prices. So what is the secret formula?

escalating the prices of classic bikes but if you look a little deeper there's a worrying trend going on here.

An auction house or eBay seller sets either an estimate or starting figure for a given item, but where the bidding goes from here is neither the responsibility of auctioneer or seller. Desire, lust, stupidity or even pure greed will inflame the bidding process. Ultimately it's the buyers who set the values, not the sellers, and even if you think that the escalation in costs is simply plain wrong this is how a free market economy works.

So where is the market ultimately going? Some would suggest to hell in a hand basket! There is no dispute that prices have risen and will continue to do so for the foreseable. The project Yamaha AS3 that somehow magically appeared in my workshop last year cost me £1200 to buy, yet eight years ago it would have been £500 at most – that's how much the perceived value of old bikes is – like it or lump it as they say.

Motorcycles as a form of investment, pension pot, financial speculation and the like, are a gamble, pure and simple. Just as we are told with stocks and shares… "the value of your investment can go down as well as up" and anyone looking to get rich quick would do well to take that on board. Understand that cheap bikes are actually rather rare and that cheap, good quality, bikes are even rarer then, perhaps, it's a little more apparent that most of the bargains have already been snapped up. If you're fortunate enough to find a Honda CBX1000, pre-unit Bonnie or Ducati 750SS in the back of an elderly neighbour's garage for £3000, then good on you. Most of us are generally not quite so well blessed. Ultimately you're going to need big pockets and a wad of cash to get on board the motorcycle investment boat now as it's likely to be sailing very shortly.

Those bikes that some folk have set aside for their later years have a value, but one that will almost inevitably fluctuate and not necessarily upward forever. That £20,000 Kawasaki Mach IV 750 may be worth £30,000 in 10 years' time but what happens after that? Some owner/investors are saying they'll sell the BSA Rocket 3, Benelli 6, 1972 Electraglide and the like when the machines are too heavy to manhandle – this may or may not work. These and similar machines will only sell to those interested in motorcycling, of which there are less, it's not attracting new age groups and it's trickier to get a bike licence.

And just how many 20-somethings that are into bikes will actually want a 1960s, 70s or 80s carburetted dinosaur as and when they finally have some disposable income? Even more tellingly, how many of us will actually want large, heavy, classics as we approach our dotage? You can see the scenario already; ageing riders all looking to offload Tridents, XS1100s, Kawasaki Mach IVs, Jotas, CBX1000s etc to similarly decrepit old enthusiasts who also don't have the core strength to manoeuvre or ride the bikes of their dreams. An unnecessarily bleak view or a glimpse into the future? Your call.

Ultimately you pays your money and takes your choice but there are absolutely no unequivocal guarantees you'll make a profit in the long term. Perhaps, just possibly, if you buy a decent, middle ranking classic now and then sell it in five years or so you may make some serious money but there are no promises implied or offered. Editor Matt has always said 'bikes are for riding, not collecting, so ride them. If you lose a few quid, you've still had fun. But if you make a few quid on the way, then hurrah'. Me? Oh, I'm just stocking up on spares for my lightweights and middleweights so I can keep on riding well into my 70s…on the assumption we still have oil you understand? CBG

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We can ride for miles and miles and...

Matt's bought a new bike – he loves it, yet it's called 'The Pig'...

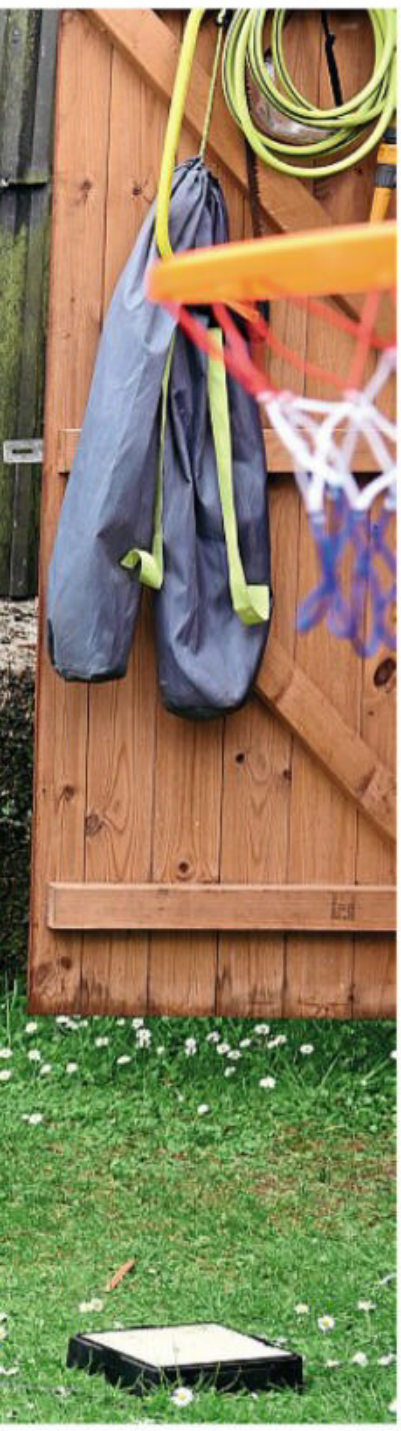
WHAT IS THIS?

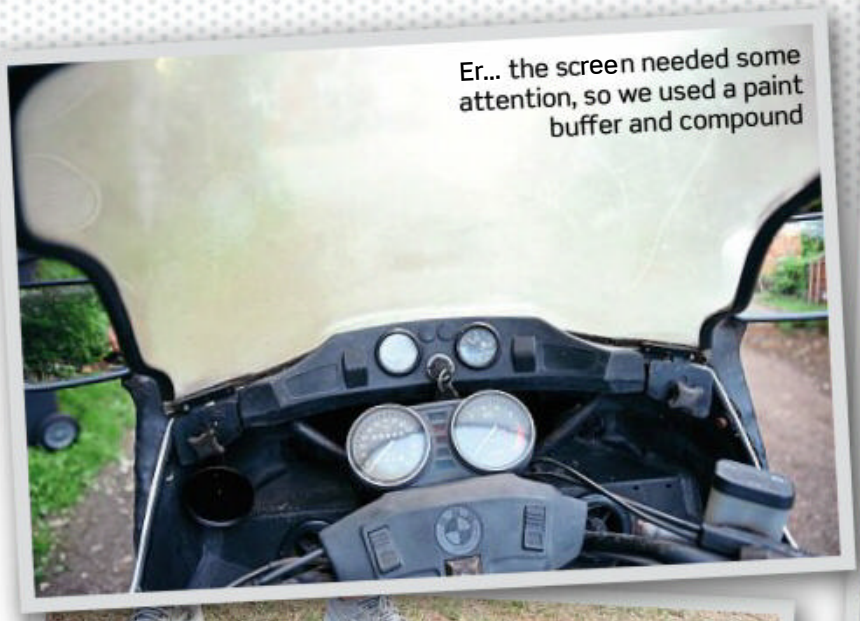
In last month's editorial I mentioned the story behind the new steed. I'd been wittering on about BMW's R100RS after featuring the 1970s German sportster heavily in the June issue. I've no idea why I like them, the looks or that engine; but I do. The way the boxer just goes about its business, mile after mile; the way you can work on them like an old bike, yet cover the distances in the comfort you'd normally get from a modern bike. They're not everyone's cup of tea, but I like them. I just can't afford one.

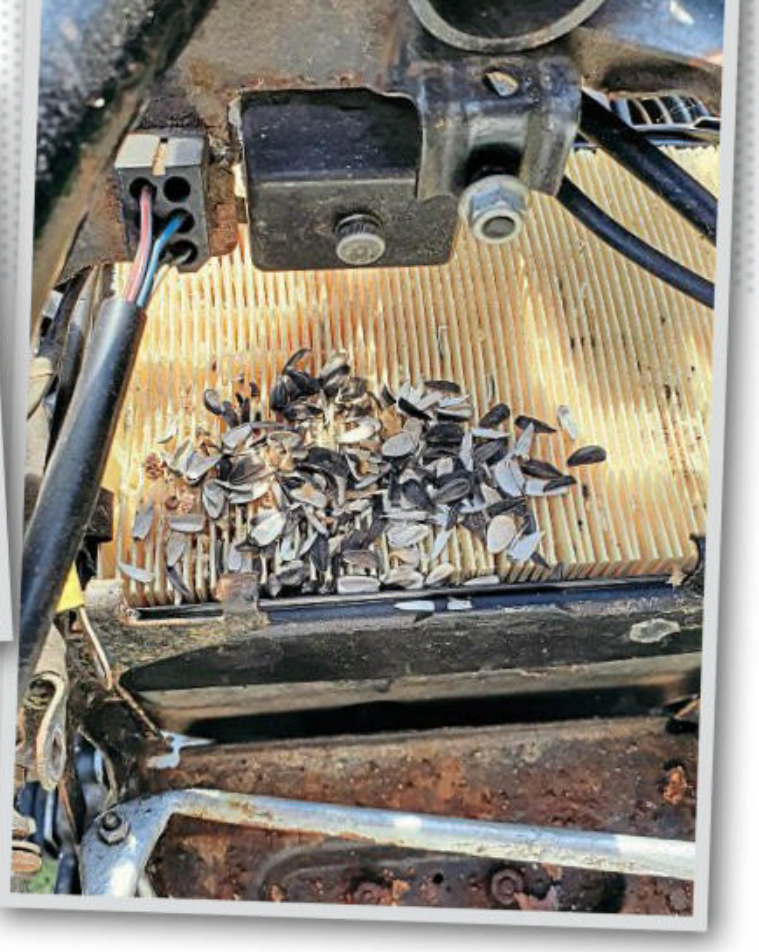
Then Nev found me this RT, the next best thing. This touring sibling is very similar, with mainly the top fairing sides, inner fairing bracket, handlebars and cables different, so nothing too tricky to convert to my ideal of an RS and none of this is destructive.

This is also the less attractive, monoshock version, which BMW re-introduced in 1988 after the R100's enforced hiatus in 1986.

It canned the R100 to make way for the brand-new K-series flying bricks, but such was the uproar from the die-hard boxer fans that they brought the big boy back. It wasn't exactly the same as the R80 which was still being sold and evolving and was used as the new base. So monoshock rear with K series-style wheels (still a drum brake on the rear, as opposed to the disc brake the K-series had) and smaller carbs (for increasing emissions issues) with a 10bhp reduction, to 60bhp. However, once you were riding this wasn't too noticeable as the torque and delivery was nicer for everyday riding, according to tests from the day.







Above: Friendly to nature – like using the airbox as a mouse home

Left: Red marks the holes. Most BMW tanks have a red liner inside... this one didn't

BUT IS IT A CLASSIC?

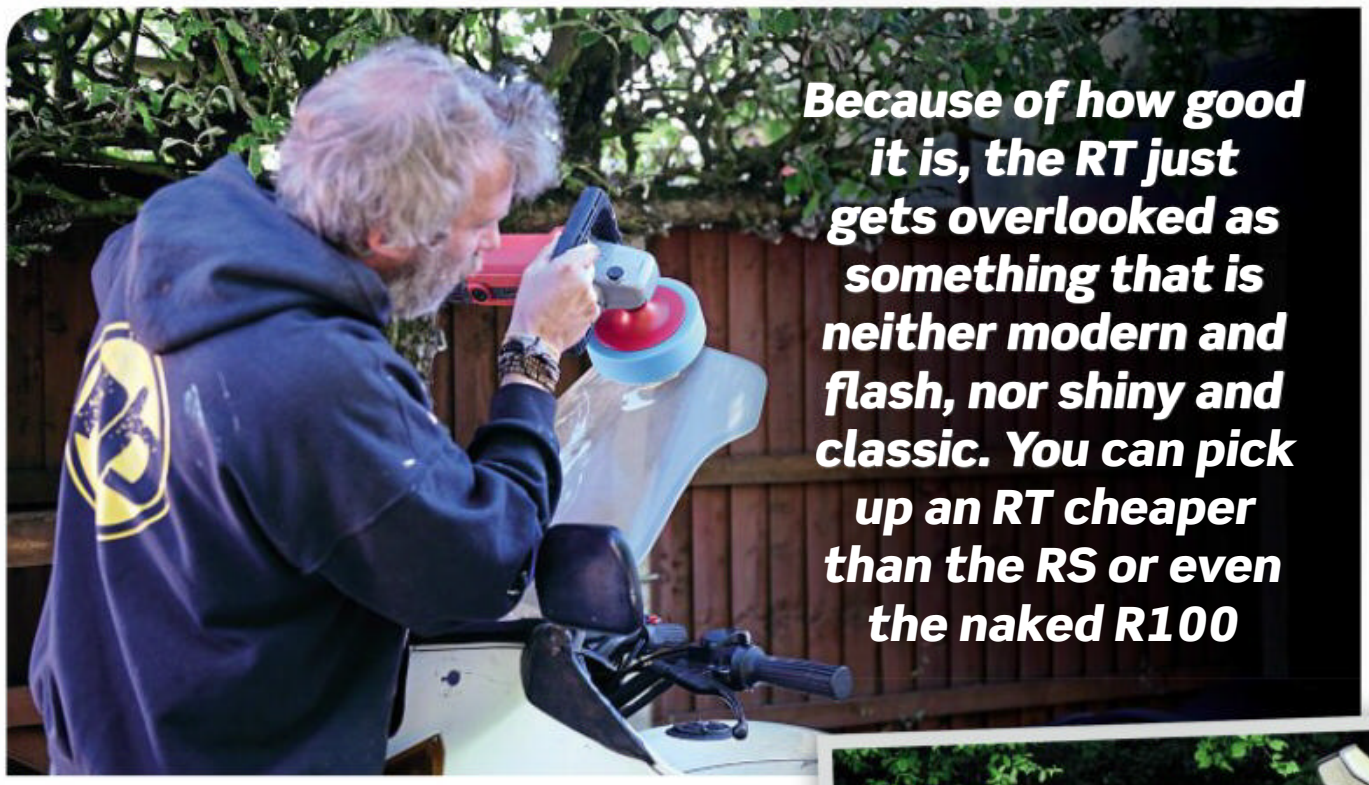
If you turn up to your local meet on a Harris Triumph T140, which were made up until the late 1980s, you would park in the 'classic' area, with the silent 'nod' of approval from the locals. But my BMW, which is the same age and designed in the early 1970s, is still an aircooled, carburetted, pre-unit twin, but looks from a totally different era; because it was so good in the first place. 'Park that over there'…

The RT, both in R80 and R100 versions, is a true classic, as one of the best, if not the first touring bikes ever built (Vincent Black Prince tried). Rain is no enemy unless you stop, power is there for overtakes, the panniers were designed with the bike and not as a tacky afterthought, and yet it is easy enough for most owners to work on. The perfect classic?

No, I'm afraid not. Because of how good it is, the RT just gets overlooked as something that is neither modern and flash, nor shiny and classic.

You can pick up an RT cheaper than the RS or even the naked R100. And as such, the RT is mainly used as a donor for every bearded, shed building wannabe to create some hideous, badly finished 'cafe racer' with an eBay brown seat. Oh, the irony of the first practical, wind tunnel-designed, comfortable tourer ever designed, turned into uncomfortable, impractical Instagram art by poseurs.

Happiness is when one BMW rider (Nev) brings you a BMW fuel tank that isn't rusty and full of holes. Though he nearly didn't let me have it as he liked the back rest...



Because of how good it is, the RT just gets overlooked as something that is neither modern and flash, nor shiny and classic. You can pick up an RT cheaper than the RS or even the naked R100

Above: As it was; ready for work

Top left: Compounding years of UV damage from the screen

Top right: Hasty repair to the spinning fuel cap

Bottom left: Airbox was full of alloy corrosion

Below: Electrics live under tank and all needed cleaning

WHAT'S OURS LIKE?

An ex-police bike could be bad – lots of miles, used daily, not theirs so riders don't care... or it could be good – regular servicing, always had everything it ever needed. To me, it looks well used, but suffered from being laid up. So I stripped a lot off, gave the subframe a lick of well-known metal paint which is impossible to get a good finish with – never again – got the white paint off the rear mudguard as it was out and cleaned up the electric relays and fuses under the tank. It's had new tyres as the old ones were so hard they didn't need air in them, an air filter as the airbox had turned into a rest home for mice, a new battery, which is enormous and a check over.

The main issue, and the reason it had been parked, was the tank had rotted out. Most BMW tanks have some sort of red coating inside, but this one didn't. So Nev kindly leant me a spare he had, which was the same colour! He then cleaned the old one up, brazed it, then lead loaded the repair and after writing this I'm off to see Ian at Tank Care Products (tankcareproducts.co.uk) to get one of his sealing kits... which we'll cover in another issue.

Other, less pressing issues are a creak from when you pull away (clutch or final drive?), rear shock is tired, brake pads feel old and the solid brake pipes could be replaced. And the filler cap decided to spin without opening; a common issue. It wasn't even locked. After a long time with different tools, including a hammer, I drilled the top, tapped it and used an M6 bolt to tighten the outer and the inner together. Not sure what to do next…

WHAT ARE WE DOING WITH IT?

Riding! The idea was to turn it into an RS, but after getting it going and tinkering with the Bing carbs (they like to go out of sync but run so much better when they are) I've just loved riding it – everywhere!

It is comfort personified for an old bike, the huge screen, while cloudy (we improved it by using a car buffing wheel and paint compound, followed by several coats of polish) is adjustable, the Corbin King and Queen seat is supportive and the new Bridgestone tyres add confidence, even without servicing the forks. It's a different riding experience to a new bike or my BSA; it feels like a 1970s or 80s bike. Roll on, roll off, use the engine for braking, don't rush the gear changes and revel in the midrange.

Slow riding is second to none – and no touring bike I've ridden has a steering lock to better this, which allied to a low centre of gravity means you can practically balance at standstill (er – not quite)... I haven't even washed it, just took the silly blue tape off. The upright riding position and high screen that means you tend to ride with your nose raised, giving you the look of 'Toad of Toad hall'…

I know looks aren't meant to matter, but they do help – I mean, our nickname for the RT is 'The Pig'. So eventually it will morph into an RS. The RT is great two up, but as you sit upright, the rider feels close to the pillion, so maybe the RS riding position of leaning further forward may help. But then turning it into an RS will undoubtedly turn into a full restoration (I'd like a gold, or black with gold pin-striping colour scheme) and I already have the Norton, so I'll service the engine, carbs, brakes and suspension, finish the tank and then, I guess, keep riding it! CBG

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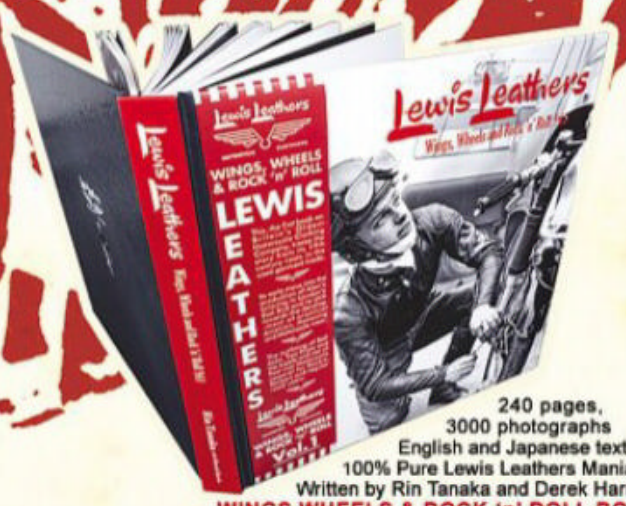

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Changing tyres

We look at how the professionals change tyres and how you can do it yourself with a few simple tools, if you want to.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT

MANY THANKS TO HUTCH AT HTE MOTORCYCLES (OLD BIKE SPECIALISTS IN NORFOLK 01328 700711) FOR HIS KNOWLEDGE, AND CHELLEY FOR MAGNIFICENT ADVICE, HUMOUR AND TEA MAKING SKILLS

I OFTEN HEAR FOLK WHO'VE BOUGHT tyres online moaning about having to pay for fitting and balancing. 'Do it yourself then' is my callous reply. You can; the tools to do it are not expensive and could last a lifetime, but you need to know what you're doing, it is physical and there is a good chance you could damage a wheel.

USE THE PROS

So why does it cost £15-25 or so, per wheel, to fit and balance a wheel? Because the world isn't there to just serve you, that's why. First off, buying from someone online prevented your local bike shop from making a few quid, so they have to recoup a little from fitting. Fitting tyres to two free wheels will take around 30 minutes; so that's half-an-hour in wages. Tyre fitting and balance machines cost several thousand pounds, then there's the cost of the tyre soap, wire brushes, valves, tubes and other sundries. Even the pressure gauge needs to be tested once a year – which costs. And once in a while a wheel may get scratched – which will need to be paid for. Then there is the big one – insurance. Should you have a blow-out are you going to sue the giant tyre company? The tyre supplier? No, you'll head to the bike shop who fitted them. You may have saved a few quid, but a local bike shop is worth so much more.

HOW THE PROFESSIONAL DOES IT

If you have the right tools and stands, take the wheels out as it saves labour. Bikes like the BMW have a front wheel that is identical each side, so mark the rotation with an arrow. We are working on a rear here, so luckily that's obvious!

The air needs removing, so either remove the valve core if the valves are recent, or pull/cut the valve out – for the money they are not worth risking. Next is to break the tyre bead seal breaker. The tyre machine has a pneumatic arm that pushes the tyre bead in from the wheel rim, breaking the seal. It's easy on tubed tyres, but much harder on tubeless, which are thicker. Move the wheel around until the whole side is free from the rim, then swap over and loosen the other side. It can be very easy to catch a wheel with the bead breaker, so you can't rush it.

Now comes the fun part – getting the jaws to clamp the rim while the tyre hides where they are… Again, time, patience and experience help. It also won't work if you skimped on the previous job of breaking the bead…

Once the wheel is held, the arm can be lowered, adjusted to the diameter and width of rim and set. Most modern machines move the arm away from the rim, or it could act as a potato peeler on the paintwork. Then your favourite tyre lever comes out and using the arm knuckle as a pivot, lever the tyre bead onto the knuckle. You can then get the machine to spin the wheel, peeling off the tyre; though some need a little help. Then repeat the other side, which means bending the tyre more, so old ones are tricky.

The old tyre soap will have solidified to the rim, along with rubber, dirt and quite possibly, corrosion. Alloy wheels need cleaning up with sandpaper or a wirebrush, while chrome rims need cleaning and possibly rust killing and painting to prevent them rotting. While you're doing this, check for cracks in the rim, broken or dull-sounding spokes which may need tightening. If in doubt with spoked wheels, spin them on the wheel balancer to check they are true. Fit a new valve or rim tape for spoked wheels.

Mount the wheel back on the machine and have a good inspection of the new tyre. Look for the correct size, the direction arrow so you know how to mount it and any damage – have a feel inside, too. Then grease me up, Scotty! Tyre soap costs little and is designed for the job, unlike washing up liquid, which stays slippery, possibly causing the tyre to spin on the rim and can corrode the metal.

Then there is the knack of 'throwing' the new tyre onto the wheel in a way it goes on as well as possible. Use the machine to finish the job on both sides and ensure the yellow dot is lined up with the valve for better balance. There's also a line around the tyre bead – use that to make sure it is seated well. If it's uneven, bounce it around until it is!

Pump the tyre without the valve core in, as this gets more air in more quickly, until you hear both sides pop once each. Then pop the core in and check the pressure and then inspect it is still seated nicely. Done!

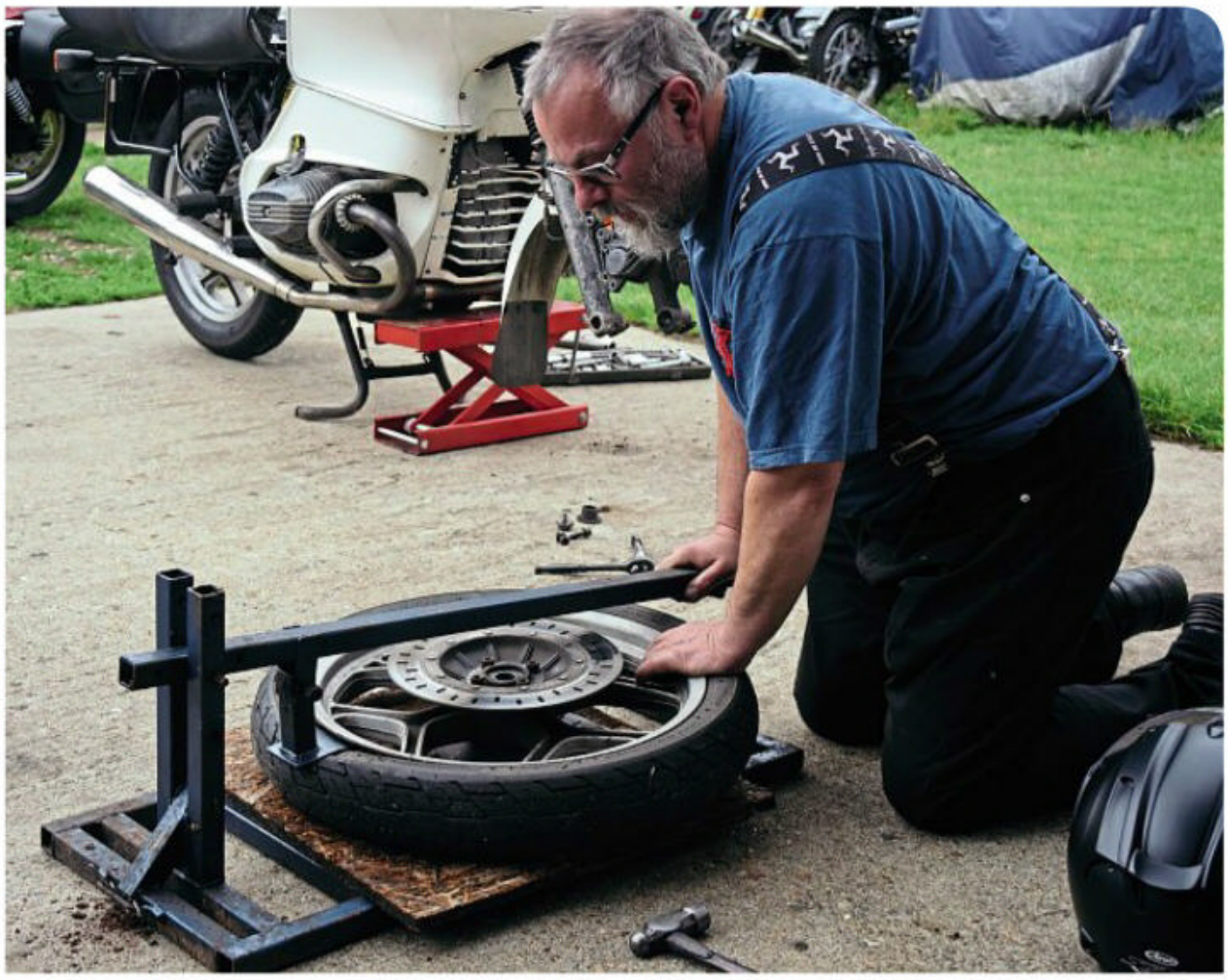
SOME POINTERS

- Short levers are no good – get long ones
- You cannot get a tubeless tyre to seat without a compressor – you can with a tubed tyre
- Always remember new valves, tubes and rim tape – don't be so tight!
- Never patch an inner tube
- Use the best quality tyres and tubes you can
- Take your time – if it's fighting you, what have or haven't you done?
- Keep an eye on the markings – most tyre have a direction arrow so fit them the right way
- You need to hear two pops, one each side, when blowing up the tyre to seat it on the bead
- Use this time to check spokes, rims, brakes, wheel bearings and parts you can't see when the wheel is fitted.
- Fit the correct tyre for your bike. Old British bikes are mainly designed for 100% walled tyres
- If you see cheap tyres ask yourself – why are they so cheap? There's little mark-up on tyres, so they are probably old stock – ask to see the date stamp from the side – this will give the manufacture date. If you use them a lot, fine. But if they're five years old now and you do a couple of thousand miles a year, how old will they be when you go to change them? Your wallet, your choice.

HOW TO FIT TYRES YOURSELF WITHOUT MACHINES

It's our opinion that if you can pay someone to fit your tyres, then do. There are no benefits to doing it by hand. But if you're working nights, tight or simply stubborn, then read on. You will need a compressor for tubeless tyres and tyre gauge to seat the tyre properly, good tyre levers, plastic rim protectors, a bead breaker (or mallet…), chocks of wood, tyre soap, valves, tubes, rim tape, lead weights, some carpet, a balancing shaft (which you can make), muscles and patience!

Hutch from HTE motorcycles (01328 700711) made this superb bead-breaking machine himself more years ago than he cares to remember! It took him sometime to design and build. It is adjustable for different sizes and prevents the use of a mallet and blocks of wood. Tube core or valve out, position the wheel and use the lever to break the bead seal. It takes time, but works. Both sides, and all the way round, remember…

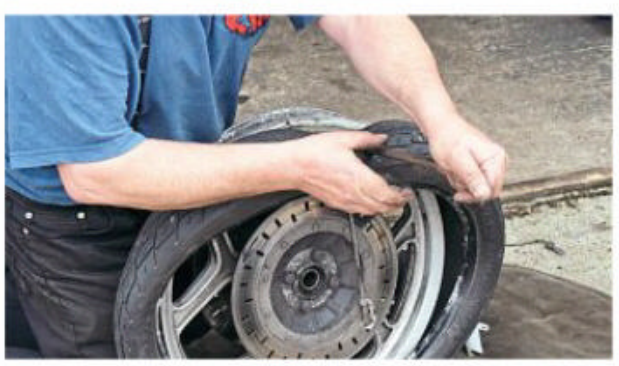


With a new valve fitted, place the wheel on some carpet, your knees on the tyre and rim protectors on the opposite side. Using your knees to help push the tyre into the well of the wheel will help give you more slack, so you can use the tyre levers to start to lever the bead off. Use one lever to hold, while using the other to prise, working carefully around. Take care not to catch tubes with the levers if fitted, although for the money it's always best to fit new ones. But old ones make handy spares!

With one side off, you now need to pull the other side up with the lever, gradually getting it off the same side as the first. You can see here Hutch gets a little of the second side off, then brings the wheel upright to get a better angle. It's easy to knock off the rim protectors and this bit gets tricky, especially with tubeless tyres. And with new rims you feel so paranoid of scratching them! Many do use a rubber mallet to 'assist' the tyre off, so again taking time helps.

Check the new tyre, then place the wheel on the carpet. Soap up the bead and 'throw' it on, then get your knees to push the tyre as much into the wheel well (the central part of the wheel that is deeper) so you have more slack to work with opposite.

Using your hands, rim protectors and levers get the rest on. Next, if needed, pop the tube in, with a little air in to keep its shape – this helps you not to pinch it with the lever – and loosely do the valve nut up to hold it in the valve hole. Then the second side goes on, watching not to catch the tube – it's amazing how flexible a new tyre is compared to an old one and even easier with tyre soap! CBG



BALANCING

A balancing jig costs from around £50 and is just a shaft held in a set of bearings with some cones to allow different wheels to fit. Once fitted, allow the wheel to self-balance a few times, marking with chalk TDC each time; they should be very similar. The more modern and good quality the wheels and tyres, the less weight should be needed. It's a guessing game at first, clean the wheel with alchohol or brake cleaner before you fit the sticky pads – you don't want the weights flicking off. Check again once fitted.

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After a lifetime of biking and working with machinery, 71 year old Peter Smith's back, hips and knees were all causing problems. He really enjoyed his hobby of refurbishing old machines but after an hour or 2 of leaning over the engine he would be in so much pain that he had to lie down for the rest of the day.

A few weeks ago, he decided to try a Bioflow Elite magnetic therapy wristband which he bought from Jenny Ryan, hoping that this would ease some of the pain. He was thrilled with the results. "I can now work for most of the day without any problems. I have been able to give up taking some of the strong painkillers prescribed by the doctor and I feel much better in myself. I was really pleased with the service I received from Jenny. After seeing the difference Bioflow has made to me, many of my friends have now bought wristbands for themselves.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
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BIKER DAVID HELPED BY BIOFLOW!

David Benson from Sheffield, is a keen biker. He enjoys attending events and taking out his Norton bike. As he is now 63 and worked hard all his life as an electrician. he was beginning to suffer from typical bikers problems including wear and tear in his shoulders and spondylosis in his neck. His shoulder pains had become severe enough for him to have a cortisone injection but he found the effects wore off quite quickly.

When he read an advert for Bioflow magnetic therapy wristbands, supplied by independent distributor, Jenny Ryan. He decided that both he and his wife, Anne would benefit from trying them and contacted Jenny.

David says, "Anne used to work in a care home and she enjoys helping with a friend's horses so she has quite a few aches and pains, particularly in her fingers and toes. She was initially very sceptical but I persuaded her to give it a try.

Within a very short time we were both feeling much better. The best thing for me is being able to sleep through at nights instead of being woken every couple of hours by the pain. Anne is also feeling much better so last week we bought a Bioflow dog collar for our 14 year old collie cross, Gemma, who has arthritis in her front legs. She already seems less stiff when getting up and she is walking with more enthusiasm.

We've recommended Bioflow to other family and friends including my 92 year old father and are very happy with the service we have had from Jenny."

If anyone would like more information Jenny will be very pleased to help them Contact: Jenny Ryan
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One step forward, two steps back. Matt is wishing he'd stuck to Airfix kits. But he says it will be finished! Bitten, more, chew...

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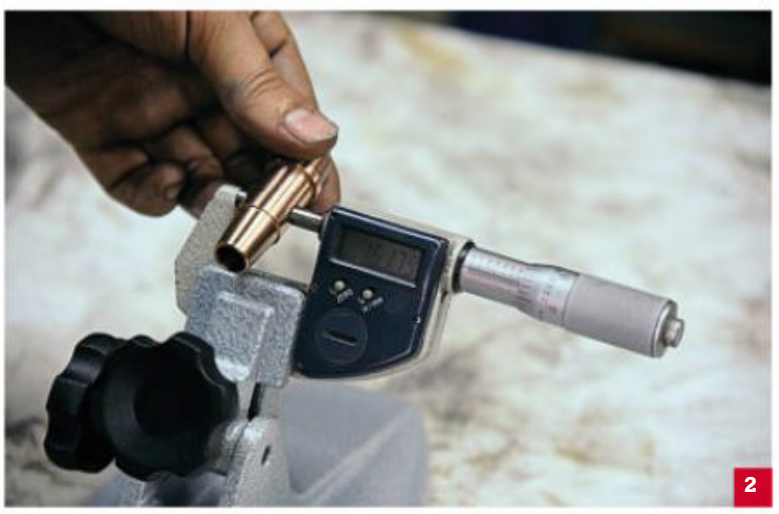
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Above: James at BDK Race Engineering builds the rockers up with Stellite rod

1. Matt checks the damaged valve guide hole before reaming for the new oversize guide...

2. ... and then checks it with the new oversize guides

With a lovely parcel popping through my door with a solid 'clunk', I knew it wasn't a flyer for a new conservatory, but some parts for the ES2. Great – let's get this damn engine together!

As said before, though many engines have passed through my hands, this is my first old Brit; and there's a lot to learn. Unfortunately, those who have learned over many years are not allowed to come round and help me, so it's my turn – with maybe a little help...

TOP END

After pressing out the valve guides last month only to find a Coke can being used to shim the worn guides in a worn head, I ordered a set of 0.010in (0.25mm) oversize guides to cure this. Back to BDK race engineering who had just stopped laughing at my 'Coke can engine' so they could ream out the head to accept the new guides. This involved lots of swearing about old engines, old bodges and trying to line up the guide hole with the valve seat. I made the tea.

With the guide hole finished, the head was put on the hot plate and the new guides placed with valves in to help hold them without getting warm, into the freezer. 15 minutes later and wearing a pair of thick foundry gloves, I removed the head and held it tight to the bench while Matt popped the valves out of the

Tolerance

Matt spent some considerable time explaining to me the difference between tolerances. As I understand it, clearance fit is where the hole is larger (a wheel axle), transition fit where the hole is the same size (like a gear) and interference fit where the hole is smaller (like a bearing in a car hub). Engineers, feel free to write in and correct me…

3

3. Hand reaming the head

4

4. Good tools last for years

5

5. Heating the head – but will it taste good?

6

6. The punch helps get the guide in accurately without damage

7

7. Recutting the seats to the new guides

8. Making sure the crank end float is 0.005in...

guides and used a nicely machined punch to hammer the guides in. They went in a smidge too easy Matt felt, but once the head had cooled down, they were solid. Should it have been an issue, there is a Loctite (I forget the number) that would have helped. But it goes to show how wrecked the guide holes were, that even after reaming to the size of the oversize guides, the damage wasn't completely gone.

Though the guide was in, the valve head (massive – both inlet and exhaust are the same size – Matt cringed and said if the exhaust was smaller it would create more power) needed to be centralised. So out came the seat cutter, mounted to a presise fit shaft in the guide, so everything was nice and true. After a couple of light passes, I was tasked to lap the valves in the old fashioned way, with a rubber-ended stick and some old cutting compound!

The head now looks great, in fact it's a shame you'll not see the bronze guide and shiny new valves. But the worn out followers now needed re-facing. As far as I know, the original finish would have been hard chrome over the iron, but Stellite is a trade name for an alloy that is incredibly hard wearing thanks to being high in cobalt; so we decided to use that. You can get it in rods for the TIG welder and it is often used to build up or reprofile camshaft lobes, so should be good enough.

8

9. Matt lost count how many times the cases had to come apart

I really enjoy TIG welding after MIG welding since I was a boy, but I'm not very good – yet. You really need to be at it regularly to train the muscle memory of feeding the rod and knowing what the material is doing before you blow holes in it – so James offered! TIG is so much more precise than stick or MIG welding and I love watching the professionals.

Once James had loaded up the rocker arms, it was my turn to give them a radiused finish similar to the original. Top end done!

BOTTOM END

I decided after getting a little low last month to start again. I started making a bracket to hold the dial gauge to the crank cases, so I could measure the end float. I also needed the internet on my phone, as my measurement tools and my brain work in metric, yet all my Norton manuals and tips from my learned friends are in Imperial.

Hutch told me to buy the Zeus chart book, which helps with this and other fascinating engineering issues, so for less than a tenner, I've ordered one. It's perfect for the workshop; the pages are laminated!

Anyway, I bolted the crankshaft into the cases, cleaned all the nuts, bolts and studs up and torqued everything all up. Original Norton nuts and bolts are really sharp and accurate, in case you've never noticed.

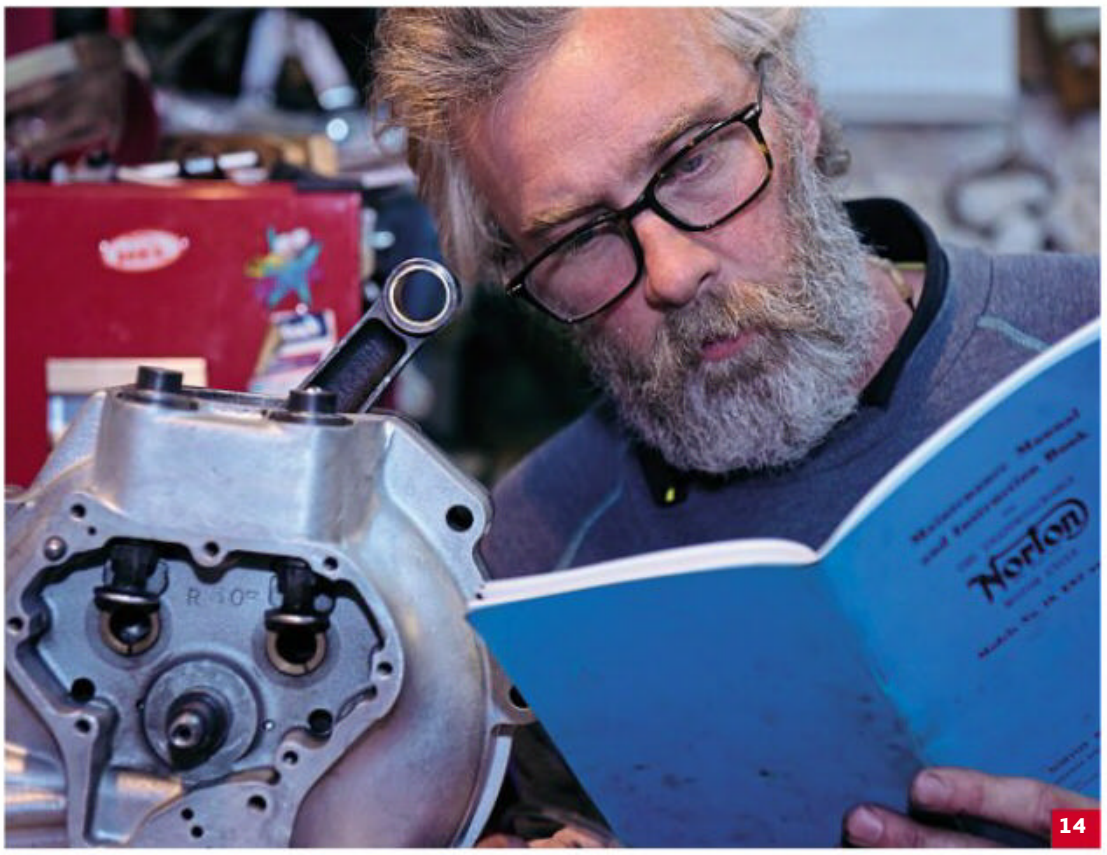
Anyway, the end float was found to be 1.4mm, or 0.05in. The Norton manuals I have all agreed

10. The shims need to be in between the crank and bearing

11. Measuring the shims to get the crank evenly spaced each side... but no workings-out in the margin

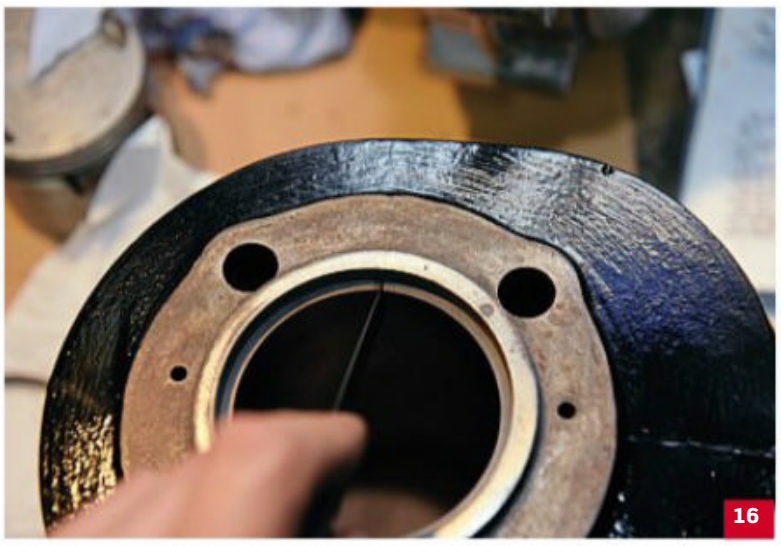
12. Now for the Wellseal to keep it oil tight!

13. New rings – Matt had to order another set...



14. No modern manual, but the old ones are plenty good enough

15. Cleaning six decades of crud from the case studs



16. Checking the ring gaps before Matt ruins them...

17. Some use feeler gauges to fit rings but you can use nails

18. Heating the piston to fit the gudgeon pin

that an ES2 should be 0.127mm, or 0.005in. So I had 10 times too much crank float.

Then, I measured all the crank shims I had, laying them out. By my calculations I needed to lose 1.27mm which split evenly across the two sides, was 0.635mm. I think. So I stripped the cases, removed the crankshaft which came out with the roller bearing inners attached, added the shims, which I could almost exactly split evenly for each side and did everything up again.

The readings I got made no sense – I had added more than 1mm of shims, yet still had 1.2mm of end float. Bad words were said, beard was scratched and then I realised – I had placed the shims on the outside of the roller bearings and not in between the bearings and the crank flywheels! I couldn't see how it would make that much difference, but I knew it was wrong. So take apart the cases, again, remove the crank, again, take the shims and prize the bearing off, then shims on, bearing on and put back together. Again.

I couldn't believe the dial gauge when I saw it – 0.129mm clearance; as close to perfect as I could get! It had only taken me eight times to get it right.

Now to check the con rod was central… luckily, that was fine, so the cases were taken apart one last time to check, seal and finally assemble. I used Wellseal, which is horribly sticky and far too runny at first; Nev told me to squeeze some out into something and let it solidify a little, then spread it on both sides after half an hour or so. This I duly did after making sure the mating surfaces of the cases were nice and clean and then bolted it all up, hopefully for the last time.

PISTON BROKE...

The sense of achievement gave me a spurt of enthusiasm. The gudgeon pin was a tight fit in the piston, so I heated it up and the pin just slid in. We're on a roll, I thought, moments before the gudgeon pin circlips fired themselves across the workshop. Hands and knees filthy, I eventually found it and popped it in.

With the wind behind me and long-awaited thoughts of riding my ES2 streaming back, the next job was to fit the new piston rings for my 0.30in

oversize piston. Some rings are slightly chamfered, so need to be fitted a certain way; others have TOP marked to help. My fading eyesight saw no chamfer, no markings and nothing on the wrapping, so I guessed they were straight-edged and ready to fit. Amazingly, I remembered to fit the base gasket!

Some people use feeler gauges to fit rings to pistons, but I have women's thumbnails (as Nanny used to say) to stretch them enough to pop in without damage. With both compression and oil control ring fitted, I oiled them up to help prevent damage to the newly-honed barrel and started the tricky job of getting them squeezed in. This was a real pain, and though I have a ring compressor, it won't work when fitting a piston from below. I was using fingers, bits of wood to steady the piston and yet I was rushing – I'd been at this for too long. What I should have done was walked away, had a cuppa and maybe come back tomorrow. But owing partly to magazine deadlines and mostly to pig-headedness, I grabbed a flat-headed punch to help. And then started lightly tapping it with my soft headed mallet.

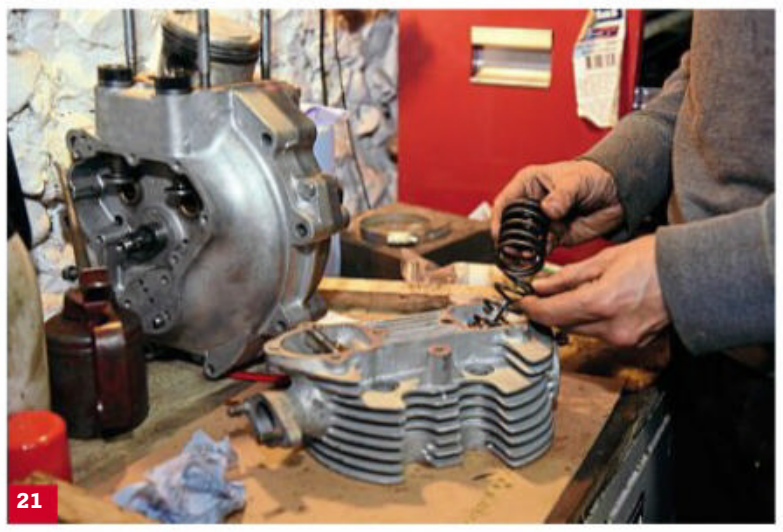
Finally, in it slipped. But as the wood was removed and the barrel slid home, it wouldn't pass the base gasket. Was it for the 350cc Model 50? Later that evening, Neville said that it was probably old and had shrunk, so just needed soaking in oil. But I didn't know this, so I whipped the barrel off again and trimmed the base gasket with a knife blade. Which is when I inspected the rings and felt a nice, sharp burr that my clumsy, rushed, flat-headed punch had stupidly caused. Oil control ring; fit only to frequent the bin.

£56 later I had new rings on their way and I had to finish the night on a positive, so I fitted the valves to the head. Which went well.

19. STOP! More haste, less speed!

20. Base gasket had shrunk and should have been soaked in oil

21. Beaten, Matt turns to the head.



NEXT MONTH: The engine goes together or someone will have a nice doorstop and the river will have a frame nestling at the bottom… CBG

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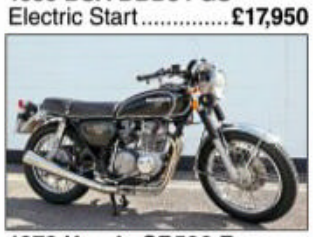

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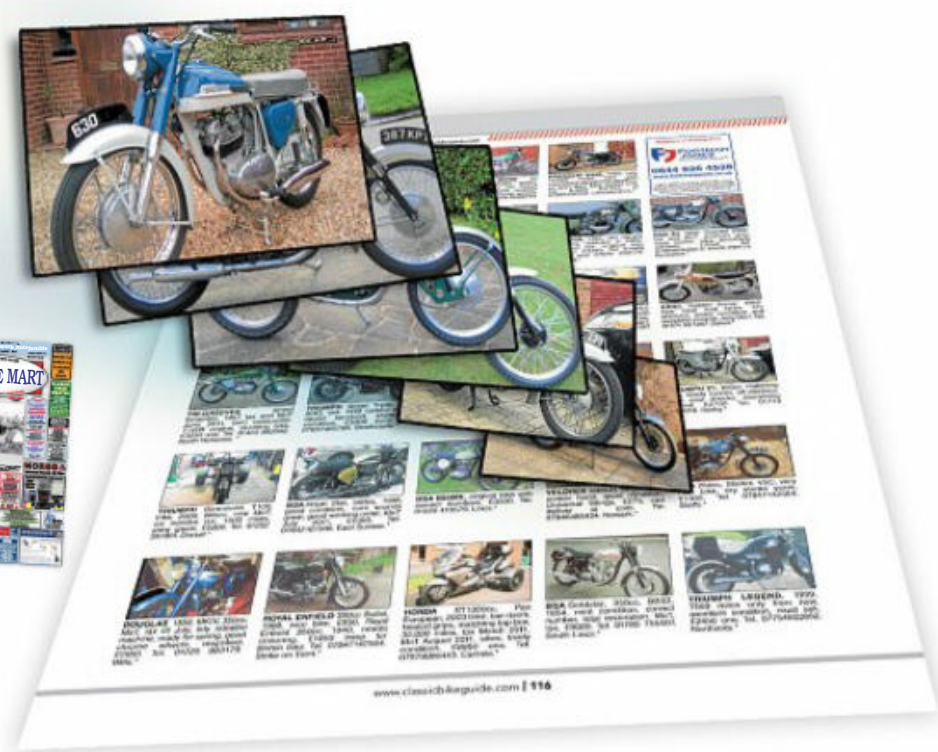

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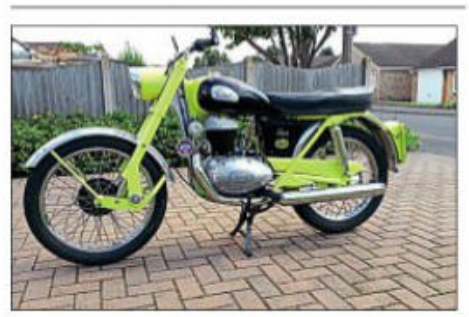

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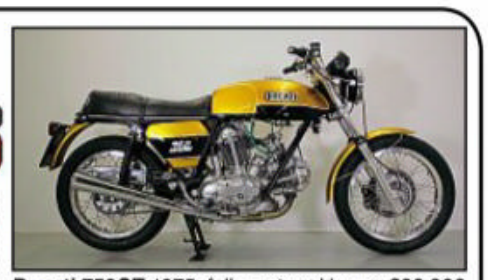

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HONDA NTV600 1989, 12 months MoT, owned for 16 years, hardly done any miles in that time, very good original unmolested condition, £1500 Tel. Brian 07479 470445 Leics

HONDA VTR Firestorm 1000cc, registered Nov 1999, great original condition, 23,700 miles, 12 months MoT, Scorpion cans fitted, £2300 ono Tel. 07938 556272; 01924 565930 West Yorkshire

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JAMES COMMET 98, 1959, ready to use, has V5, to show or use, comes with James parts list for all 1958 models, £1195 Tel. 01516 090404 Merseyside

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KAWASAKI KE100 1980, W reg, will be tax & MoT free this August, V5 in my name, owned the bike for 4 years, been fitted with a new Motobat gel battery, £1500 Tel. 07563 999540 West Yorkshire

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KAWASAKI W800 2300miles, showroom condition, £4850 ono Tel. 01883 348181 Surrey

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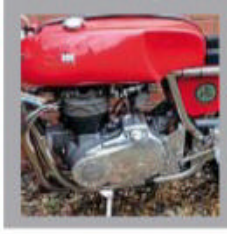

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ROYAL ENFIELD Continental GT535, 2015, only 1150 miles from new, comes with std and aftermarket silencers, single and dual seats, £3450 may take p/x Tel. 01328 700711 Norfolk

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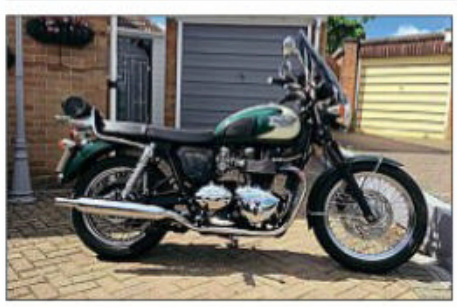

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YAMAHA XV250S Virago, 2000, X reg, 27,700 miles, screen, rack/backrest, engine bars, heated grips, V5, MoT Feb 2021, £1750 pos p/x combination or Guzzi Tel. 07913 032864 Yorkshire

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YAMAHA DT50MX 1985, red, total rebuild by Red Rose Classics, better than new, must be seen £1850. Tel. 07913 508245. Beds.

YAMAHA XT660R 2008, 4 stroke single, 5 speed, black, vgc, regular use but very low mileage, two owners, bash plate, £2900. Tel. 07989 413125. Staffs.

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WANTED OLD CLASSIC JAP or Jawa Speedway Bike, 50-70's, upright engine in good condition or restoration project, if you can help please contact. Tel. John 07788 768313 anytime. Bucks.

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Miscellaneous

BOOKS Classic Bike Service Guide (Jeff Clew), brand new, £18. The Book of the Triumph Twins, 1969, good clean copy, hardback, some wear, £12. Motorcycle Care and Maintenance (David Frost), hardback, pages yellowed but otherwise very good, £12. Tel. Ron 02086 995307. London.

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FRANK WESTWORTH

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

Is it time to sing the praises of some modest machinery? Welcome to the age of the middleweight...

"'Everybody' knows that Matchless 350 lightweight singles (ahem) are rubbish compared to their noble 500 brethren – and even the 350 heavyweights … but in fact, that's simply not the case."

Myths are wonderful things. We all know this – and I bet we all know lots of myths, too, all too often accepting them as being actual facts rather than simple opinions with an egotism problem. One of the many classic myths I've never really subscribed to has been the one which insists that middleweight motorcycles are somehow rubbish, fit only for day-to-day hacking when new and fit for not much in this age of reverence for all the traditional big banger singles and snorting 650 twins.

And I was just as bad, really, always preferring a 500 to a 350, and a 650 to a 500, back in those long-lost days when choice was cheap. Why? Why was I always but always willing to pay an extra shilling or two for a bigger engine? Two reasons: peer pressure and personal tubbiness. How's that for honesty? In most cases, a middleweight engine would have performed daily duties as well as a bigger banger – a G3 Matchless would have handled the congested commute as well as a G80. But you know how it is, the bigger the bang the wider the smile.

I was not alone in this way of thinking, which is why prices asked for middleweight motorcycles, even at the height of the classic boom, were always more sensible. And I've never been able to resist a bargain. Several times down the years I found myself on the receiving end of bikes on offer. And there were always opportunities. I remember talking with a chap who was hoping to sell his (actually very, very nice) 1966 AJS 16 and shaking my head sadly. 'If it had been an 18…' I hinted, with only a single insincere sigh or two. Of course he submitted, and I ended up with a completely splendid 350 short-stroke AJS single which was a real flyer! No, really. It was very quick. At the same time I was riding a Matchless G80, an older 500, and the AJS 16 was faster, had better brakes and handled better. Strange but true.

Of course I sold it and bought another CSR twin. I've never claimed to be smart.

But, repetitions of this purchase process found me standing in The Shed a few weeks back staring at an eclectic assortment of recently uncovered relics. Relics of those limbo years when middleweights were cheap. Not lightweights, of course. For no reason I have ever understood, many riders of a certain age retain a curious fondness for the tiddler aboard which they learned the dodgy art of motorcycling: BSA Bantams and C12s, for examples, and Triumph's Cub and seriously misnamed Terrier. Strange. I learned to ride on a 197cc Panther and have no weepy nostalgia for Villiers singles of any sort.

However, selfless application to studying prices currently being asked – and even achieved – for middleweight AMC machines, for which I have an inexplicable fondness, has revealed a startling truth. This is the age of the middleweight. In classicland at least. Really. Which is heart-warming, especially if a chap happens to have a small collection of inglorious and decently unlovely AMC 350s – which I do. Two of them are twins and one is a single. There is another couple of middleweight machines laying around the place, but they date from the dying daze of BSA / Triumph, and are therefore beyond sympathy.

Strange, isn't it? 'Everybody' knows that Matchless 350 lightweight singles (ahem) are rubbish compared to their noble 500 brethren – and even the 350 heavyweights … but in fact, that's simply not the case. My own Matchless G5 has well over 90,000 miles on its small odometer, and fired up after a decade's rest without a qualm. What is a qualm? Who knows…

And it's the same with Norton's 'lightweight' twins, of which we have a pair; a 350 Navigator and a 400 Electra. Both of these have sat under covers in a sad state of neglect for years, because… well, because they're not very good bikes, right? No one would want to ride them, right? Wrong on both counts. In fact all three machines are great fun to ride. Easy to start, easy to handle, and with decent 'classic' performance. They even have great brakes.

And as lots of us gallop moodily into antiquity – our own, as well as our motorcycles' – suddenly light weight, easy starting and simple maintenance appeal more than the effort of kicking up a Panther 120, or even a Commando. Suddenly the sneering has turned into enthusiasm. And have you seen the prices attained by Norton's self-starting ES400 Electra recently? What's that you say? You really fancy a nippy Norton twin with electric hoof? Good move. Excellent, in fact. And it just so happens… CBG

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 columnist 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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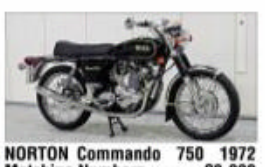

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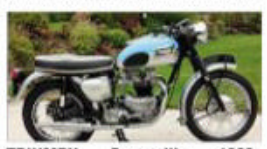

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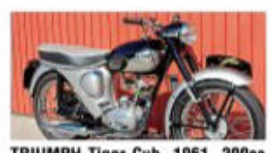

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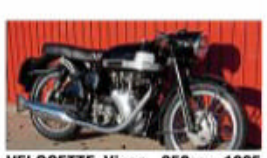

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