Dear Andover Norton Customer,

January continued the busy trading we enjoyed in December, so again little got done on the "home front“, in my case the personal projects I was hoping to have finished by now.

As you may have seen in our parts bulletin, we had a load of Commando seats in at long last after being out of many types for quite a while. The note to customers resulted in a rush for seats but with the numbers ordered we still have some stock!

Norton History

Every few years we get approached by someone who wants to write a book on Norton’s history. I recently wrote to another author-in-the-making:

“Given there are at least two very good Norton histories, the post-war era book by Steve Wilson, and the complete history book by the late Mick Wollett, I doubt another one is called for.

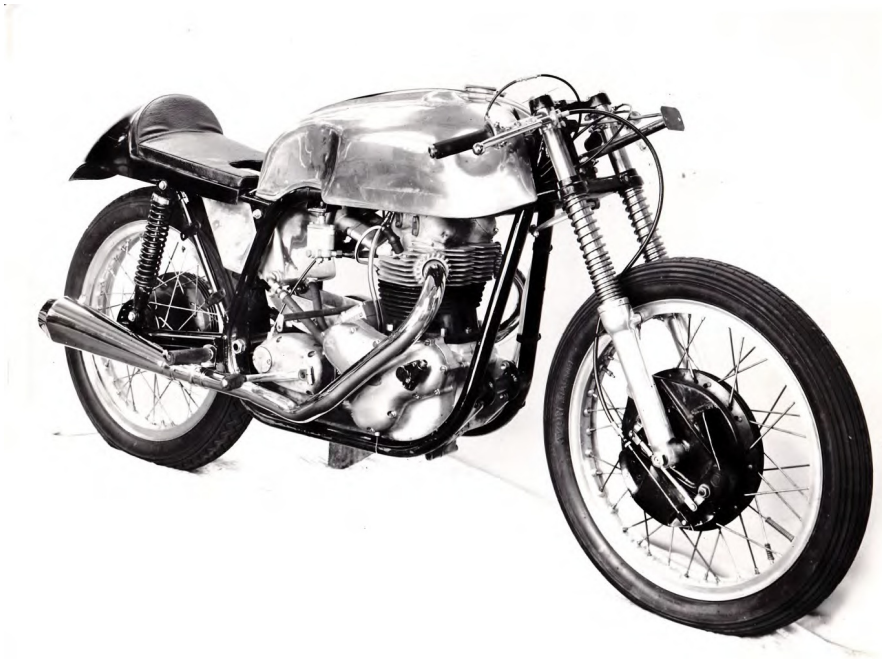
What these two books do not cover in depth is the last thirty-odd years, the Shenstone rotary era under Philippe LeRoux and David McDonald, then the era under a succession of fraudulent Canadian managers, the takeover of the whole marque under Kenny Dreer and his financier, probably up to now the last honourable attempt to revive Norton, and then the completely dishonest and in fact criminal Garner era.

The new TVS era is far too short to cover. Though with decent funding and the current CEO, I am more optimistic than I was in the last 30 years.
Having met and having had business dealings with all of the characters over the years I can assure you a write up of this period is far beyond the capabilities of an amateur.”

What I didn’t say was that a lot of the information cannot be found on the net, nor can it be gleaned from the people involved. From experience I know most will tell you fairy tales if, indeed, they speak to you at all.

Lowboy Frames

One project we inherited, or rather acquired, from the Hemmings was the “Lowboy” frame.



Above: The original Domiracer with the “Lowboy” frame.

The “Lowboy” frame was Doug Hele’s successor of the McCandless “featherbed” design, taking it further into the modern world. It was the logical development of the featherbed chassis, and Hele’s way of making the 500cc twin competitive in the TT. It was designed to become the standard racing chassis but the AMC-instigated move from Birmingham to London with the closure of the Bracebridge Street raceshop prevented it.

Before the “featherbed” frame most motorcycles had pretty simple and unstable bicycle type frames. Only few, like the brilliant Cotton frames, were logical in design and thus stable.

Above: pre-war “racing” frame of my 1937 Inter. Bicycle heritage obvious.

The more power the engines got the more “interesting” it became to ride and race with these frames. From experience with my 500 DOHC Garden Gate Manx I can tell you the beast weaves along the straights and in the bends one involuntarily oversteers. When I first rode my featherbed Manx I could not believe how easy it was to ride compared to the Garden Gate.

The featherbed consists basically of two big loops that go around

engine and gearbox. A swinging arm frame ideally has a direct connection between the steering head and the swinging arm mounting points. The featherbed is inhibited by the dimensions of the engine/gearbox units. On a Manx especially the engine dimensions top to bottom are enormous and on the original featherbeds demanded a flattened right hand top tube to provide space for the Manx cambox.

Above: Our 06.7201 featherbed frame: two big loops.

Shop

That said, there was potential to not only continue from that high front part in a more direct line down to the swinging arm, but also, by widening the gap between the bottom frame rails, to get the engine mounted lower in the frame. This Doug Hele did, at the same time lowering the seat subframe and thus reducing the frontal area with the rider more hidden.

Above: the original factory lowboy frame Mick won races with in Japan with a Commando engine driving it. Originally fitted with an outside flywheel 350 works Manx engine as the flattened right hand tube reveals. Now all we need to rebuild it is a 350 outside flywheel

engine….

Above: A Hemmings replica Lowboy, similar but not 100% identical

When the factory in Birmingham was closed by AMC, the race shop also closed down and Paul Dunstall bought most of what was left. He then produced **his** version of a Lowboy, and we have one of those, too:

Above: A Paul Dunstall Lowboy-inspired frame

I rather like the idea to stiffen the steering head further backwards. “Real” Nortons relied on the head steady/engine/engine plate structure for that.
It is most probably no coincidence that Rob North’s frames for the 1970s works Tridents were but a further development of the featherbed chassis, even more radically in the lowboy direction. I seem to remember Doug Hele had something to do with these racers….

Now back to the real world of available Norton parts: We have now gotten everything sorted to actually produce a batch, from the right grade of steel tubing and brazed. However, they will come at a price and with our stock value at an all time high I am not prepared to commission manufacture of the first batch of Lowboy frames without firm orders for most of them.

For a frame with swinging arm we look at a retail price of £3,950 Pounds plus tax. If you want one please contact us and, given enough enthusiasts wanting one, we will commission a batch to manufacture.

Our Bikes

Joe's Signal Orange Roadster:

As I have said before, I live in a densely-populated area on the outskirts of a big city and tend to go to work on very busy streets populated by today's disc-braked cars with unpredictable drivers at the helm. My original '71 drum brake leads to several hairy situations per week, with ladies spotting a parking space in front of a supermarket, emergency braking abruptly, and oblivious van drivers taking my right of way, talking on their phone or just dreaming.

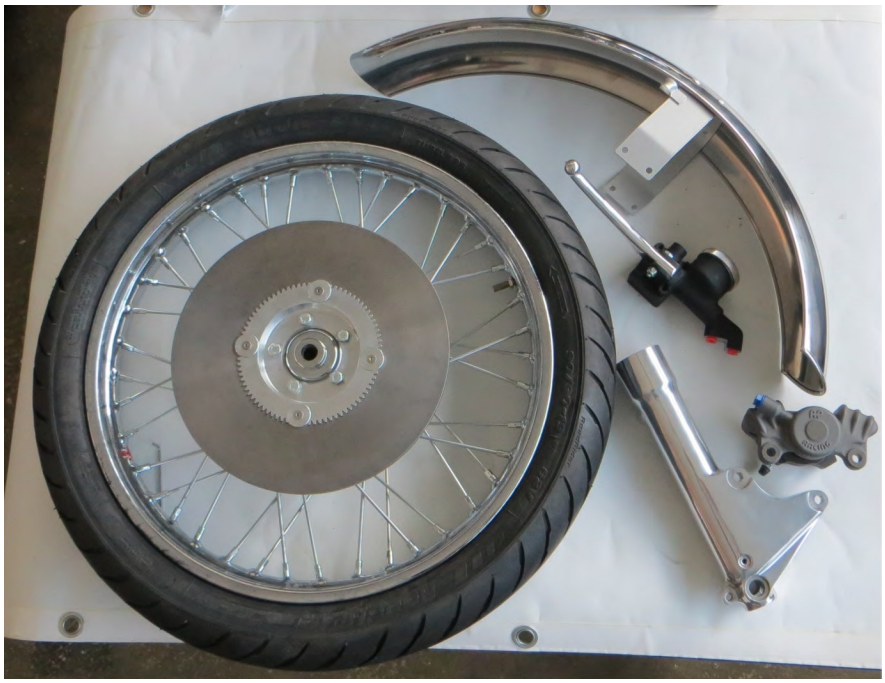
Above: My front end before I started. Ok on B-roads but not very reassuring in dense morning rush-hour traffic in our area.

At first the brake conversion stalled. All my fault because I did not check if all the components I had actually fitted together or not. My stupid little mistake was the washers 06.3471 that stop the brake disc from falling off the adapter. I had plenty, all of them from dealer's inventories acquired over the years. I foolishly thought I could use those. With Production Racer parts made by several parties over the years, most of whom did neither have access to the drawings nor to original Norvil production racers, this was taking a chance. I found at least three different sizes and only one single washer was suitable. So I had to wait for the weekly delivery from Andover until I could proceed.

You may have guessed by now what brake I plan to have in my daily transport. I hate floating discs, because they look wrong on 1970s bikes. Plus certain aftermarket offerings are known for, A) the discs growing in service, thus locking up the front brake and B) the floaters washing out in the disc, thus giving disc and floaters a very short lifespan.

Hence I stay with the original “Norvil” design, adapted for the standard front disc hub. Norvil Production racers used a different hub, but we have disc adaptor 13.1678 to fit a Proddy racer disc to a standard Commando production hub.

I laid out the main components for you to show roughly what it takes:



I had a secondhand hub for a disc-braked Commando (available new from us, 06.2867), and had it built with up our spokes (1x ea 06.3922, 06.3923, 06.3924, 06.3925), nipples (20ea 06.2595, 06.3207) and rim (06.1951). To this I fitted the adapter 13.1678, with dished washer 06.3469/5 and disc 06.3849. Our new sliders (06.3547/R & 06.3547/L) we had intentionally cast with an “rear” for a mudguard stay. So a standard mudguard with but one stay 850Mk3 style can be fitted.

I had the team in Andover make me a mudguard undrilled for the tubular stay so I can adapt it myself.

I decided to use one of our APCP2195-1002EO calipers. We had these original 1970s-type calipers made exclusively for us by AP some years ago. Naturally you can either use the later CP2696-38EO type or (worse?) the Grimeca pirate copy but I wanted the bike to look period.

Since the bike was of the drum brake type before I also needed a master cylinder and, naturally, I use our 13mm one, 06.4871/13.

Through the washer hiccup, I only got the front end in before writing this “Source”, so all the little fittings are either provisional or simply missing. I will post a picture of the finished conversion next month.

Meanwhile we plan to offer the conversion kit to all customers who want more braking power on our webshop. Mind this is just a base kit, and can be added to according to requirements, and, naturally, it is a question of taste if you want the caliper in front or behind the slider, and on the left or the right hand side- all that is possible.

And on rims in general:

Our Ashley sent me the picture one of our customers took of his stainless steel rim. We don’t sell stainless rims, not so much because I fear they are all as bad as that, they aren’t, but because chromed steel was original. As were the zinc plated steel spokes.

How our non-stainless parts keep up is shown in the picture of my front drum brake wheel rebuilt in 2011 and shown now, over a decade later, in that time ridden in all weathers for about 22.000 miles. So stainless is not always the answer.

Joe’s TX750

As you know I had a seizure in Rijeka with the right hand side running

far too lean. I put this down to the carbs and bought a set off Angela Hemmings. In fact the last set Mick assembled. Naturally, DPD managed to lose the parcel containing them and a load of other parts in October 2021 and haven't managed to find it since.

Hence I had Rainer Zumach look at the carbs for me, plus lightly hone the cylinder to clean it up and to coat a new set of our forged STD 850 pistons 06.3838/F (the TX is a 750 short-stroke racer) to allow for the increased size of the bores. He also adapted a set of +.020" rings (06.7960) for the bore size.

Above: coated piston, a trick Joerg Winkelmann has used on race engines with good results.

I was a bit weary of putting the barrel back on, having last done it many years ago, but with the excellent piston ring clamps I still have from my times as Ed Rowe's importer it was no problem at all. The head was more of a challenge. In the old days I could put a Norton Commando head on in my sleep, but that was about thirty years ago.

Add to it my old short-sightedness that allowed me to see an ant fart has given way to far-sightedness that makes everything near a blurred affair. Using specs isn't quite he same. I then found I had no lamp in the workshop small enough to light up the insides of the head so the rear pushrods were always in the pitch-dark and I was never quite sure if they had engaged correctly. It all ended up with me fitting and taking the head off again three times(!) until I was satisfied everything was where it should be.

Bad enough on a standard Commando, but on the TX they fitted the engine higher up in the frame for ground clearance so the top tube is in the way. That even though I took the front isolastic mounting bolt out to lower the engine a bit.

It all came finally together and today I did a test-start on the start machine and both pots sounded great and the exhaust pipes warmed up evenly so we seem to be getting somewhere. As always the proof is on the track and that won't happen before May.

Ashley's bit.

I have noticed in recent weeks on the web that a Norton caught fire many years ago and the cause was the fuel lines. The new owner now intends to rebuild this bike as the fire damage was extensive but not so bad to prevent the bike being rebuilt. Since I have been in Andover Norton this is the third burnt Norton that I am aware of, the case above could have been prevented by a routine checks that really should be carried out on any classic old bike, however the other two incidents were not a fault of the bike but sadly by tumble dryers in the garage.

My MK3 now needs a new base gasket and two new tyres and an oil change. This work will be done in the next few weeks, but the tyres this time will be the Roadrider MK2's as I have not tried them. The Conti Classic attacks were a very good tyre, but the cost and life does not make them a road going choice. The rears wear out around 3.5K miles and the front has lasted 3 rears but now has road camber wear on it so it also needs changing.

Whilst the head is off the Premier carburettors will get a clean as they were last cleaned about 6K miles ago. It has been good to see that they have stayed in tune for this period, but are now at a point where I can just notice them falling out of tune, this might be due to the E10 so hopefully a strip will reveal more. I will get some photos and in the future produce a report on how to set them up especially the last operation as this is often omitted or done wrong leading to the bike stalling at traffic lights.

It is now looking like Hampshire, at the request of the Hampshire Police Commissioner, will be the first in the country to get average speed and noise cameras to catch vehicles with rear facing number plates on the A272 and A32. Why they could not just say motorcycles is beyond me. This installation is proposed on the back of 4 weeks of surveys at two different locations in Hampshire in 2020, however the test equipment only caught 4 motorcycles that could be identified and 18 others that were motorcycles but the number plate reading camera failed to record the bikes registration plate. The cost of this installation will be nearly £700K funded by Hampshire tax payers.

Open Day

Just a quick reminder that our 2022 Open day will be on Saturday the 21st of May.

For our upcoming Open Day, we will also be hosting a stand for the SERV Wessex Blood Bikes. Their Charity provides free transportation services for hospitals in Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire for things like Blood/Plasma, Medicines and other vital medical supplies and equipment.

During the pandemic, they also volunteered to assist with delivering medication and supplies to vulnerable patients who were shielding at home and unable to access doctors and pharmacies.

Thanks to their hard work and dedication, hospitals can transport supplies to their destinations quickly, 24 hours day, 7 days a week, by using their bike’s small frame to navigate through traffic to deliver potentially life-saving material. They also work in conjunction with the Hampshire Air Ambulance Service serving as couriers between their bases and the hospitals.

The Blood Bikes are 100% Donation funded, and do not receive any backing from the other sources and run are by a team of dedicated volunteers acting as, riders, drivers and despatchers among other roles. Any donations made go towards the running and maintenance of their vehicles and operational costs, as well as purchasing new bikes to provide more access to the services.

We are proud to support SERV Wessex and their wonderful work and we would grateful for any contribution made to them. https://servwessex.org.uk/

Featured Products

A new addition to our sales desk is our new Oxford Products display stand. If you are on the lookout for a new security chain or Bike Stand, check our webshop!

BEAST LOCK

Shop

Oxford LidLock - Black

Shop

WORKSHOP MAGNETIC TRAY

Shop

STRETCH MOTORCYCLE COVER BLACK (MEDIUM)

Shop

OPTIMISER 3X (ADVANCED BATTERY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM)

Shop

INDOOR MOTORCYCLE COVER (MEDIUM)

Shop

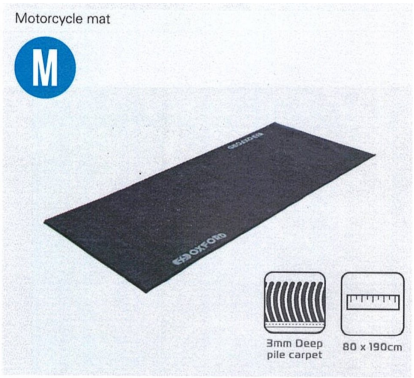
WORKSHOP OIL CATCHER

Shop

BOSS CHAIN LOCK

12mm x 2.0m

Shop



WORKSHOP MOTORCYCLE MAT

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REAR PADDOCK STAND

Shop

That's all for this edition of the “Source” so until next time!
The Team at Andover Norton