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COVER STORY

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GERRY LAURENCE'S RETRO BONNEVILLE

Story: MIKE SEATE
Photos: SIMON EVERETT



Gerry Laurence isn't a terribly lyrical man, but when it comes to café racers, he's a veritable Oscar Wilde. "I much prefer them to standard machines as they're as individual as snowflakes and no two are the same," he said.



Spirit of the '60s Redux

The British policeman, who spends his off hours building and riding some of the most pristine, well-engineered roadsters in a country rife with the little silver buggers, graced these pages back in CRM issue #2 with his Norvin special. This time, Laurence has turned his formidable talents towards the Hinckley Triumph Bonneville, a machine that's emerging as the most popular modern retro café conversion. So why this radical shift of eras for a machine dubbed "Spirit of the Sixties?"

"Café racers are iconic and part of motorcycling history. They take you back to a time when things were simpler and the British motorcycle industry ruled the world. With the economic downturn and the demise of the \$100,000 chopper, bobber and bagger guys are looking for something different-but-affordable and turning to the café racer," says Laurence.

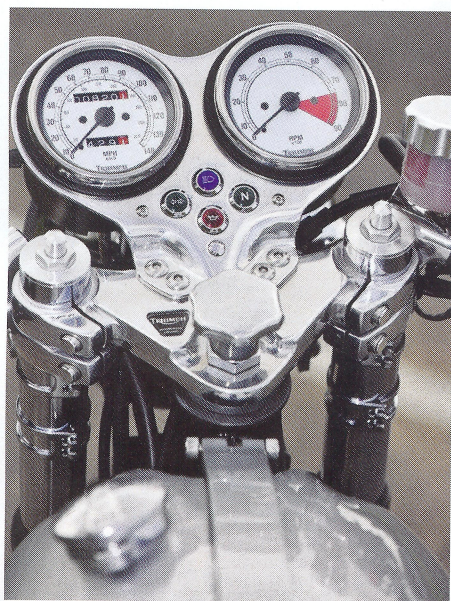
With this in mind, Gerry envisioned building a café racer that both old schoolers and new jacks would dig. We're talkin' a bike with the look and

the sound of a 1960s road-burner possessing the reliability and ease of starting of a modern machine. According to Laurence, the obvious choice of engines was the Hinckley Bonneville engine as it looks—at first glance—to be a 1960s Bonneville T-120 engine. With its electric start, bullet-proof reliability and vast aftermarket, the choice was easy, he said.

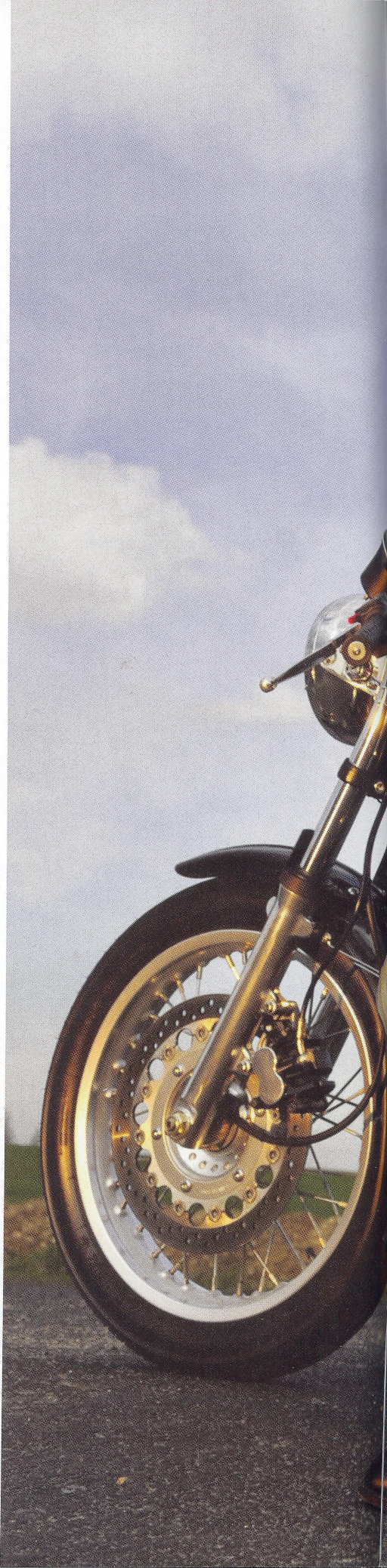
After scanning magazines and the web for a donor engine and frame, Gerry located a friend who was selling an unfinished track-bike project that consisted of a T-100 Bonnie engine nestled in a retro Norton featherbed-type frame. "I could see the possibilities, it needed loads of work, but it was just what I was looking for, a price was agreed and money changed hands," he said.

The engine started its short life as a T-100 Triumph Bonneville of around 2004 vintage; it had about 1,000 miles on the clock before its untimely demise in an accident. Gerry spared no expense, blueprinting the engine and then porting and gas-flowing the cylinder head; the stock pistons were canned, replaced by a high-compression big bore kit while mild racing cams were added. The swingarm mounts were machined off the rear of the engine and a conventional swingarm set-up is used. The engine is mounted in the frame by four small engine plates. This adds a level of vibration over the stock rubber mounts, and is intended to offer a genuine 1960s ride, warts and all.

The featherbed look-alike chassis is a one off and is far lighter than the standard Norton frame. It's been designed to accommodate standard Triumph Thruxton components such as the stock wheels and front forks which Gerry utilized in his build. The fork lowers have been stripped and polished to reveal the aluminum base materials while the adjustable shocks



More '60s than a nehru jacket is this screw-in steering damper and alloy gauge plate.





Spirit of the '60s Redux

are from 1970s legends Koni.

Typical of Gerry's attention to period detail is how the stock gauges have been stripped of paint and polished, while the lighting comes courtesy of Suzuki's naked behemoth GS-X1200, replete with short brackets milled to take the ignition switch and give the machine a more compact look.

"The short, Lyta Manx-style petrol tank, seat and side panels are hand made in aluminum to complement the lines of the frame," Gerry says. "The side panels conceal the battery, solenoids and other electrical components and paint is in British Leyland fern silver." He decided to leave the paint scheme plain with just the Triumph logo on the tank rather than put black and red coach lines on them as they would look

too much like Manx items. Detail, like we said.

The oil cooler has been relocated to a spot outside the frame downtubes as the custom chassis left no room in the factory position; likewise, the very retro sweptback exhaust pipes fouled the oil cooler so the owner fabricated new stainless steel oil feed and return pipes.

Gerry said the most difficult part of building a special involves hiding things like wiring which was not easy-peasy on this machine. A solution was found in sourcing all the switches and relays from a used parts dealer and then purchasing a new wiring loom. "Modern wiring diagrams are, to say the least, difficult to read but not impossible. Armed with a meter, I checked out all the wiring circuits matching the wiring

to the variety of switches I had bought. Time consuming and frustrating it is, but also very rewarding when you get it right. After a week of evenings and some long days I finally had everything working and hidden away," he said.

According to Gerry the machine is very quick on the road, and handles very well on modern rubber, as evidenced from the smile in his photo. "Stopping is well catered for with disc brakes front and rear. It sounds glorious, albeit mums and babies may not agree," he jokes.

"I have to say that it is a very different machine to ride than my Vincent Rapide or Norvin, but the acid test for me is that a lot of people do think it's a 1960's motorcycle, which was after all the object of this project." **CR**

