

Spirit of the Sixties

WORDS: GARRY LAURENCE
PIX: CLINTON
MODEL: JO LAURENCE

This bike was conceived some thirty five years ago in my mate's front room, before the advent of computers and late night drinkers, and is the third in a series of specials. There was not much to do when returning from the local bike café, Johnson's on the A2 by Brands Hatch, but sit around drink more tea and coffee and talk bikes. This is when all the planning of a bike we were never likely to build took place.

They were never built because, even back then, these were expensive bikes to build and we just never earned enough money to fulfil those ambitions.

At the time TriBSAs and Tritons were the order of the day and Norvins were a rare beast indeed, but they fired my imagination as the King of the Café Racers. As time went by I drifted away from bikes, eventually selling my eight valve Westlake Triton, and moved onto cars but I never lost the dream of building a Norvin. I restored some nice cars - Mk2 Jaguars and an XK150 - but they are another story.



My return to building specials and restoring standard bikes came about with the purchase of a Triton that had been laid up for years. I bought this from a work colleague and set about building a Triton to rival the best. I named this bike 'Spirit of the Sixties' and, having completed this and with appearances in the classic bike magazines, my attention was once again focused on building a Norvin. I searched for a long time to find a suitable Vincent engine but everything I looked at was very expensive, used and abused, and worn out with broken fins and leaking oil everywhere. In the end I purchased a wreck of a 500cc Norvin that'd been in a back garden for years, threw ninety percent of it away and started from scratch. This was the basis for the next special, 'Spirit of the Sixties 2' which, again, graced classic bike magazines, but all the time I still had my sights on the ultimate prize - a 1000cc Norvin café racer built to a standard not seen before.

Having failed to find a suitable engine and getting hacked off with travelling

hundreds of miles in search of the Holy Grail I decided the way forward was to build a new engine. A good friend of mine, John Wyatt who runs the Norvin Centre, did me a very good deal on all the major parts required to build the engine, and Gary Drake at the legendary Godden Engineering was given the task of actually building it into one piece. To fund this project I had to sell the Triton because today's prices for anything Vincent are worse than ever and I was not prepared to cut corners.

While the engine was being built I concentrated on the rolling chassis - I purchased a



"IN THE END I PURCHASED A WRECK OF A 500CC NORVIN THAT'D BEEN IN A BACK GARDEN FOR YEARS, THREW NINETY PERCENT OF IT AWAY AND STARTED FROM SCRATCH."

Manx frame and V5 and so the build began. I completed the rolling chassis with Manx forks, TZ Yamaha racing brakes front and rear, swan-neck clip-ons etc and, for a long while, that was it. Eventually I got a call from Gary to say I could pick the engine up and, to be fair, it looked like a piece of jewellery. All the cases were sand cast so the outer covers had to be removed for polishing, and then the Amal carburettors and the Alton alternator were added to complete the engine. I placed the engine in the frame and pondered for some time as to whether to machine off the swinging arm lug cast into the rear of the cases that stops the engine from going into the frame neatly. This is deemed to be sacrilege on a Vincent engine by Vincent enthusiasts and, being a Vincent owner myself, I can understand that point of view. This, however, is not a 1949 HRD engine or of historical

interest - it was built with one purpose and that was to power this bike. So off came the lug. Now I could position the engine in the frame where I wanted it. I then made the engine plates to suit. The only problem, other than having to make several sets of engine plates before I was satisfied with the fit, was that I had to alter the top frame rail to allow the removal of the valve caps to do the tappets once the engine is installed - this was simply a matter of cutting a crescent moon shape out of the frame rail and bronze welding it back in reversed.

With the engine in I took the rolling chassis to my local tank man for petrol and oil tanks, the chain guard and the seat to be made. Steve, the tank man, insists on making custom fit tanks to each individual frame because he then knows they will definitely fit - this guy is an artisan in working aluminium and produces

"THE DAY CAME TO FIRE THE BEAST UP. THE ENGINE, BEING ALL NEW, WAS VERY TIGHT AND DID NOT SPIN OVER EASILY BUT, AFTER TEN MINUTES OR SO, IT FIRED AND RAN VERY WELL."

the best work available and, although you have to wait, it's worth it. He cursed me more than once as I would not compromise on design and he had to make the Manx 'elephant's foot' oil tank so I could fit it from the rear and this meant the rear wheel, swing arm, rear frame spreader and mudguard had to be removed to allow fitment. I think it was worth it ... I haven't asked Steve.

With the tanks made it was the exhausts next - the last piece of the dry build. I used John at Campbell Custom Exhausts as he had made the two inch straight through 'pipe for my 500 Norvin. I designed the 'pipes using foam plumbing pipe lagging taped into position and John made the 'pipes to this design, not conventional but it worked.

With the dry build complete and all brackets made and welded into position it was time to strip it down for paint and powder coating. Phil at Bikecraft, who does all my painting, was given a brief of what

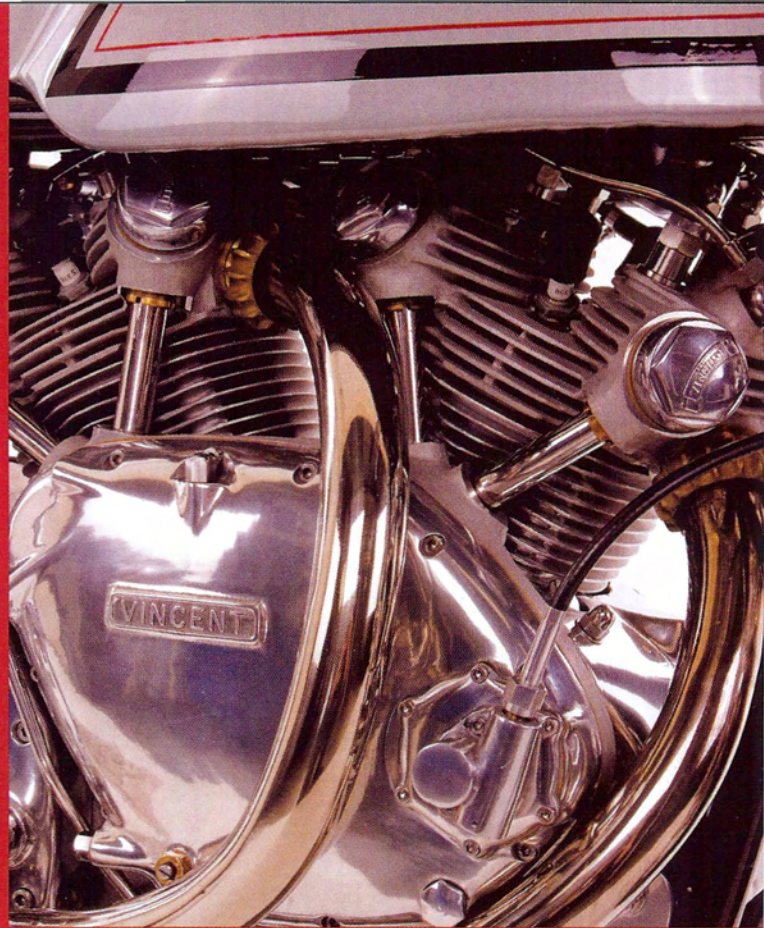
I wanted and has produced a show-winning paint job - 'Best in Show' and 'Best Paint' at The Ace Cafe's, café racer concurs competition at the Retro Race Show - and the seat went to Gary at Blackbird Leathers for the seat cover to be made and embroidered with the name of the bike, 'Spirit of the Sixties 3'.

With all the paint and

metal work complete and everything polished, there was just the final assembly and wiring to do. Sounds easy enough, but one slip or scratch and it's back to the beginning. On that note I did manage to put a dent in the tank and the air was blue for an hour or so, I can tell you. The tank went back to Phil for a re-paint as the dent was right on the artwork. Apart from that the final assembly went off very well with no other hiccups.

The day came to fire the beast up. The engine, being all new, was very tight and did not spin over easily but, after ten minutes or so, it fired and ran very well. All systems



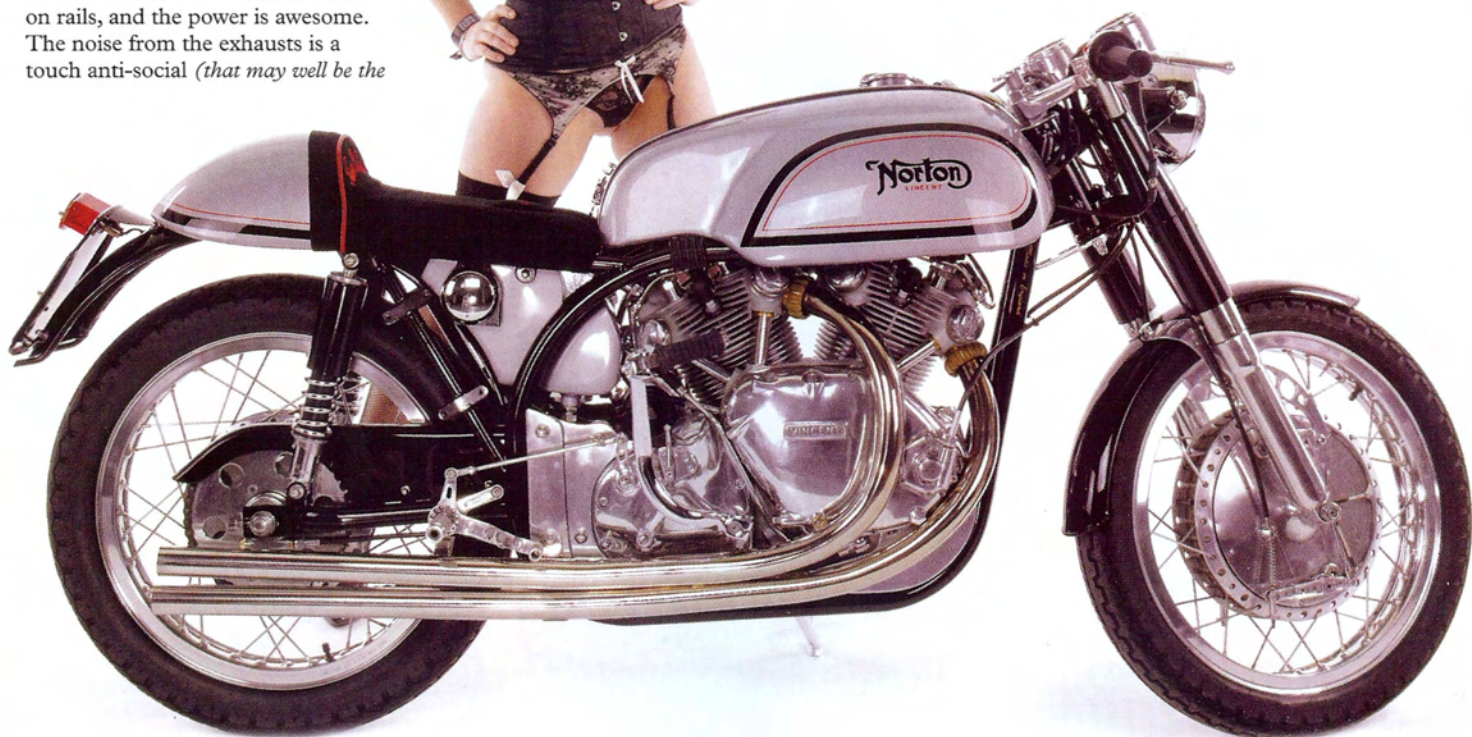


were checked out and I booked it in for the MoT. On arrival at the station I kept the bike on low revs bearing in mind the straight through 'pipes - they raised an eye brow or two, but all was well when I explained they built them like this in the Fifties ... With MoT and insurance it was off to the Post Office for my free road tax. After some debate as to whether it was free or not, they conceded and gave me the road tax as the original bike hadn't been taxed for donkeys' years.

What's it like to ride? Just superb! After thirty five years of waiting it's all that I expected and more. It handles and brakes like it's on rails, and the power is awesome. The noise from the exhausts is a touch anti-social (*that may well be the*



**"WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE? JUST SUPERB!
AFTER THIRTY FIVE YEARS OF WAITING
IT'S ALL THAT I EXPECTED AND MORE.
IT HANDLES AND BRAKES LIKE IT'S ON
RAILS, AND THE POWER IS AWESOME."**



Specification Sheet

Original Year, Make & Model

2006-07 Norvin

Engine

Vincent 1000cc air-cooled v-twin, built to Black Shadow specification by Gary Drake at Godden Engineering, twin plug heads, MK II cams, 32mm Amal carbs, velocity stacks, newly-machined Vincent flywheels, Vincent Black Lightning con-rods, V2 multi-plate semi-dry clutch, triplex primary drive, BTH twin spark self-energising electronic ignition, one-off alloy offset gearbox sprocket, twin 1&5/8" stainless steel Black Lightning-style exhausts, stainless steel oil lines, minimum of 55bhp@5700rpm

Frame

1954 Manx Norton, modified foot rest hangers, Barleycorn Engineering foot rests & levers, top frame rail modified to allow valve cap removal, oil return line & timed breather pipes bronze welded to frame, rear frame spreader modified to take rear engine mounts & oil tank mounting platform, various brackets added for horns & wiring

Sharp End

19" Morad stepped alloy rim, stainless spokes, Yamaha TZ350 10" four leading shoe brake with laser cut frames & stainless steel mesh for cooling, green racing brake liners, short Manx Norton Roadholder forks, stock Manx Norton bottom yoke, one-off alloy top yoke, one-off stainless steel swan-neck clip-ons designed by owner, standard Lucas switchgear, chromometric speedo & rev counter with synchronised needle sweeps, modified Norton Commando surrounds

Blunt End

Manx Norton swingarm modified to take Norton-designed chain guard & speedo cable support brackets, Koni adjustable shocks, Reynolds chain, one-off alloy offset sprocket, 19" Morad stepped alloy rim, stainless spokes, Yamaha TZ350 brake hub modified to take speedo drive, green racing liners

Tinware

Standard Manx Norton front mudguard mounted on home-made 'y'-shaped brackets, hand-made four gallon Manx-style fuel tank, Manx Norton-style alloy single seat with one-off cover designed by owner & made by Blackbird Leathers, Manx Norton rear mudguard modified with twin breather pipes for engine & oil tank, one-off alloy Manx Norton-style central 'elephant's foot' oil tank

Electrics

Main loom designed & made by owner, Alton alternator, Boyer Powerbox for direct lighting, no battery, 7" Lucas headlight, standard Lucas tail-light with water jet-cut Vincent emblem

Paint

Silver with black & red coach lines, airbrushed Norton/Vincent tank logo, mudguards in two pack black by Phil at Bikecraft, Kent

Powdercoating

Frame & swinging arm by Morden Powder Coating

Polishing

All aluminium polished by owner, every stainless nut & bolt hand polished

Engineering

Engine built from new parts supplied by John Wyatt at The Norvin Centre & built by Gary Drake at Godden Engineering, foot pegs & swan-neck clip-ons by Barleycorn Engineering, tanks & seat made by local firm, all other parts designed & made by owner

Thanks To

John Wyatt at The Norvin Centre (01708 470526); Gary Drake at Godden Engineering (01372 844072); Phil at Bikecraft (01258 0765578); John Campbell at Campbell Custom Exhausts (07946 759990); Gary at Blackbird Leathers for the seat cover (0208 460 0373); Barleycorn Engineering (01379 586728); & Jo for modelling with the bike ...

"YOU BET IT'S WORTH IT! IT STOPS TRAFFIC AND BRINGS A SMILE TO MY FACE EVERY TIME I RIDE IT."



understatement of the year! N.) – it sounds like a dragster on steroids. Was it worth it? You need to be the judge of that – my view is that 1500 hours of work and a serious pocket lightening have produced the motorcycle of a lifetime. You bet it's worth it! It stops traffic and brings a smile to my face every time I ride it. People wait around just to hear it start. Kids and old guys love it. It even makes some kids cry and their mothers frown ... I can't imagine why. One guy summed it up for me, 'that's automotive pornography, mate'. Well, you pay your money and take your choice. This is not

everyone's cup of tea but, for anyone who was riding bikes in the Sixties and early Seventies or is part of the café racer culture, it is.

What's next? Well, I'm still looking for that elusive Vincent engine to build another special which will have a different theme, but in the mean time it's back to the restoration of standard bikes as and when I get them. I've just finished a Triumph Tiger Cub so need another project.

For further detailed pictures or more information visit www.norvin-spiritofthe60s.com or email me at manxnortonman@yahoo.uk

