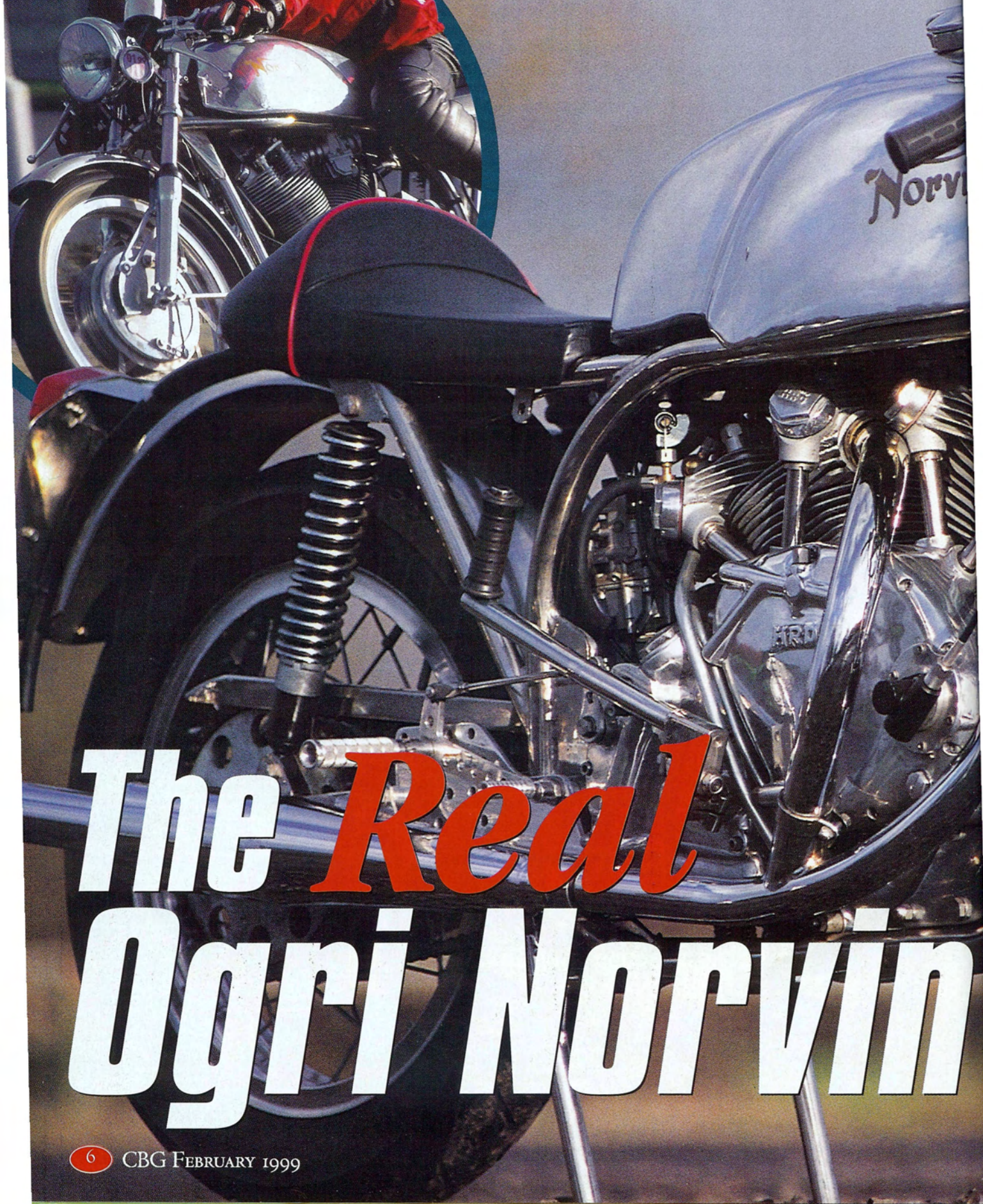
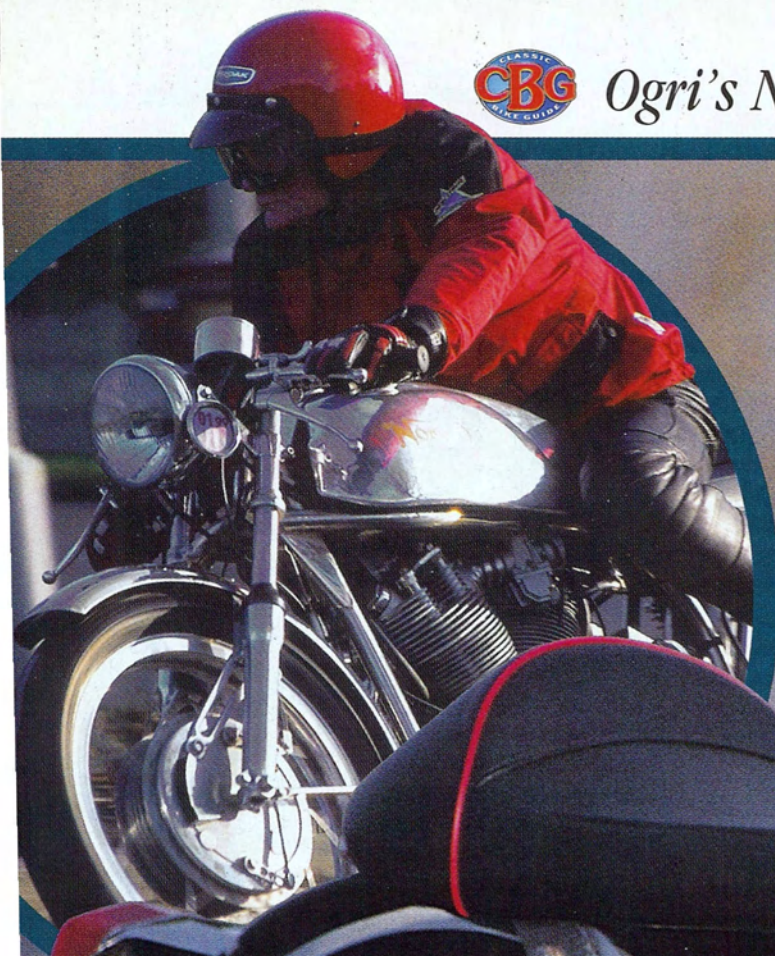






Ogri's Norvin

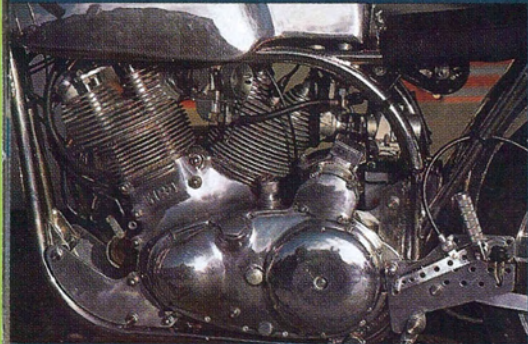
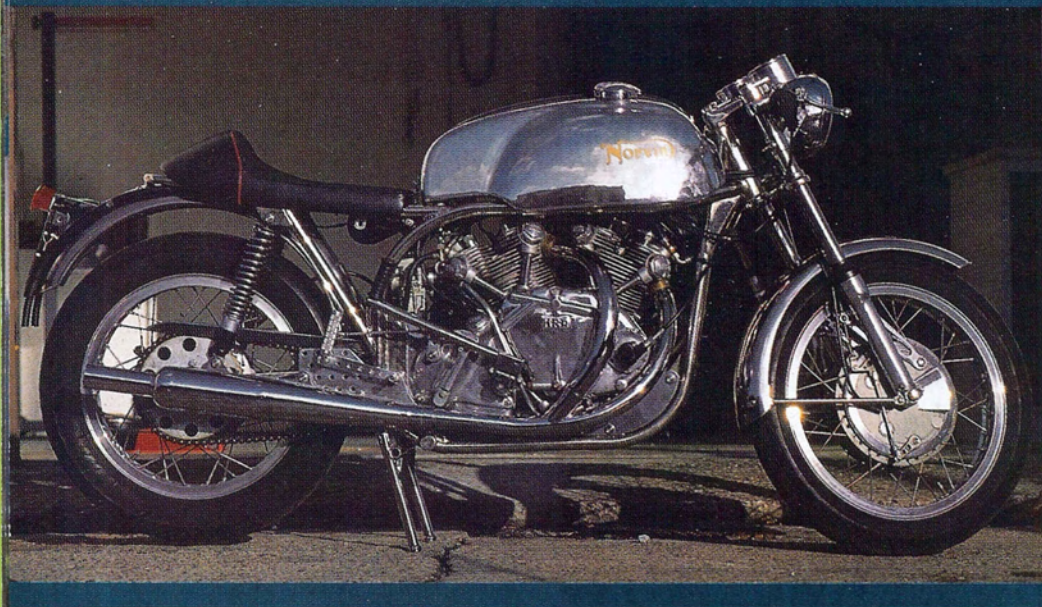


# The *Real* Ogri Norvin



**One of motorcycling's most enduring heroes is a cartoon character, a creation of artist Paul Sample. Ogri, the character, was often to be seen aboard a particularly tasty special, a Norvin, no less. Jim Reynolds rides Paul Sample's own Norvin, and tells a tale or two**

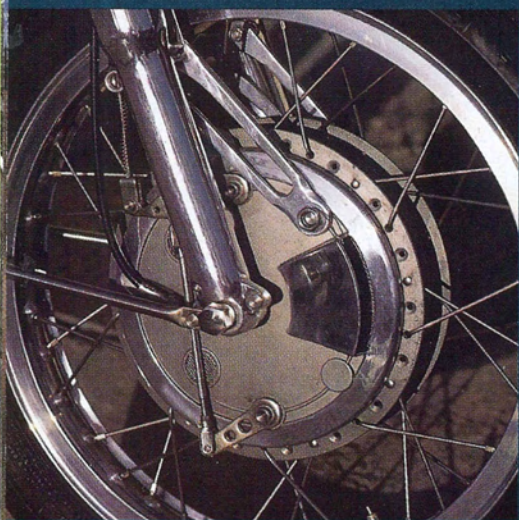
**Y**ou really must know about Ogri. That ageless rebel who's ridden his faithful Norvin across the pages of *Bike Magazine* for years, zapping foreign so-called superbikes, pushing errant Volvos and aggressive taxis off the road and generally taking serious quantities of urine out of poseurs and pompous gits. With the passing of time he's mellowed just a little, enough to appear in the revered and rather middle-aged pages of *The Daily Telegraph*. I suspect that's not so 



**Top: If you can look at this motorcycle and not get the horn, you're a woman.**

**Above: Vincent's wonderful vee-twin fills a Featherbed frame completely.**

**Below: GriMeCa front brake is 220mm diameter and comes with back-to-back twin leading shoe unit. It works as well as it looks.**



Midland Classic Bikes aren't as well known as Ogri, but they're pretty good at what they do.

It's headed up by Keith Williams and Andy Cavalot, two guys who've made their way in business – Andy by designing and manufacturing electronic alarm systems and Keith by installing them. They've both sold out to bigger companies in recent times and looked around for an interesting way of making a living with a bit of capital backing up their ambitions. They both have a long background in British bikes that dates back to schooldays – Keith as founder of Autocycle Engineering with his brother Chris, Andy as a man who got into the habit of restoring bikes to his own exacting standards and nothing else – and knew of each other's ability to do a proper job. In May 1998 they combined to open Midland Classic Bikes in Rollingmill Street, deep in picturesque downtown Walsall and close to Junction 10 on the lovely M6. Their intention is to give a really

much a matter of Ogri moving into the middle class as a motoring editor recognising an outstanding cartoon that crosses all social boundaries. When I introduced my kids to him, many years ago, they fell for his irreverent rebel ways and enthusiastically showed their latest Ogri Annual to their mates, most of whom had no motorcycle background, but all loved the character.

Ogri is the product of (the talented) Paul Sample, a man whose knowledge of bikes is reflected in his (sharply observed) drawings and the basic habit of riding the things. He also has the great advantage of living in Shropshire, where you can enjoy fine riding roads, some of the best scenery in the land and a welcome absence of urban pressure. In all a good bloke, who knows enough about Great British Bikes to mount his hero on a clearly identifiable example of the ultimate classic British special. That's a Norvin, of course, and anything else is less. Very much less.

At the 1998 International Motor Cycle Show, a large event held in the National Exhibition Centre, there were a couple of notable trade stands. One by Ogri Marketing, showing their latest offerings (I know about those because my missus presented me with the catalogue for her Christmas list) and the other by Midland Classic Bikes.

**Ogri is the product of the talented Paul Sample, a man whose knowledge of bikes is reflected in his sharply observed drawings**

professional service to those who want an old British classic restored, maintained or even built from scratch. And if you're wondering about the security for precious bikes in a place that Keith Williams laughingly dismisses with the quip: 'The local Army go to Northern Ireland for a rest cure after Walsall' – just remember that their premises are the same

place where Keith ran his alarm systems company. You don't have to do much more than break wind on the pavement outside the locked and wirefenced car park for an electronic sensor to start buzzing and blipping on the control board. I got the feeling that if some local villain with social ambitions ('Nah, never mind about doin' door-to-door crack deliveries on a

C90, you'll be much quicker on a Norvin') tried his hand at breaking in, he'd end up with a fried hand and a personal interview with either the Deputy Chief Constable or the Senior High Wizard of Walsall West Lodge of the National Order of Very Aggressive Punishment People.

Back to Cavalot and Williams, men who know their British bikes in some detail. They have beautiful tank restoration work on display, and gladly go off into technical detail about the right way to do the job. You want a little body filler applied to that teeny dent in the tank, sir? Well, just have a word with your local car body shop and they'll gladly slap on a little plastic and rub it to shape before applying a quick spray job. But we certainly won't do that sort of thing around here.

The proper way is carefully beating out dents – one of the few advantages of Black Country manufacturing industry's decimation has been the number of highly skilled craftsmen willing to take on work that uses skills once dormant – and using lead filling where the craftsman's hammer and dolly can't reach. Then it's copper plated before nickel, chrome plate and paint is applied.

MCB won't let their plater's men do the essential pre-plate polishing, because commercial chaps take an article and polish ready for plating. Period. Full stop. Never mind if the 40 year-old steel of the tank is just microns thick as a result, that's what you do before plating, isn't it?

Not at Midland Classic Bikes it ain't. They do the polishing themselves, so any tank where the steel is deeply pitted isn't just buffed away to the point of leakage. Repair, make good and polish as necessary to get the right finish. The result is a tank that's superb looking and ready for use.

So the standards at Midland Classic Bikes are high. Take your faithful old dear in for an MoT and you'll come away with a detailed report on its essential functions (look, Jenkins Minor, we are NOT referring to your grandmother here, so take that smirk off your face at once) including

braking efficiency at both ends.

After all, if you're serious about riding the thing, an independent check of this kind is a common sense measure.

When they met the public

*Below: Olde Jim is a trifle short in arm and leg, so has to stretch a bit. If only he could get a working foot under the gear pedal, he could almost ride the thing.*

at the wonderful and picturesque NEC, Keith and Andy featured a truly gob-smacking Norvin, a ground up rebuild to a standard that proudly represents what they can do. And among the people who gathered to gaze at its graceful lines and imagine how well Mr Vincent's wonderful V-twin would sound through a Goldie silencer was Paul Sample. As we've mentioned, he knows what a Norvin should look like and he was pretty smitten by what he saw.

Paul is working up a series of Ogri cartoon films for Channel 4 if the essential backing for the venture can be raised. One of the requirements is the right sound track for a Norvin and here was just such a bike. Sample knows about these things, and you can't imagine him drawing Ogri in dynamic action with a Yamaha FS1E exhaust note adding that authentic touch. The bike was right. It might be Andy Cavalot's own, but he was willing to talk sensibly. A deal was struck and Andy's Norvin became Ogri's.

But lucky old me had already been promised a ride on the bike, so before Mr Sample could arrange a double Securicor escort to get his cash into Walsall, we gathered on a bright and chilly day to try the Ogri



**Below: Mr Andy Cavalot and the Norvin he's just sold to Paul Sample. I don't care what price he got, you can't expect him to look happy about it.**

experience. None of that country lanes dreaming. This is an urban warrior's bike and that's where it would be ridden, on the tough city streets.

First of all, a little detail about the bike, a blend of 1947 Vincent Rapide engine and gearbox in a 1960 Wideline Featherbed frame. The engine has a racing history and was built in race trim by 'Prof' Smith, a Birmingham school caretaker who fitted his own lumpy cams. It was campaigned in an outfit by the late Whacker Westwood, who swapped to a 750 Norton motor for the TT before he was killed when he hit the unforgiving barrier at Mallory Park's Esses. Whacker had left the start line so quickly that his passenger got left behind; his absence wasn't noticed around the long righthander of Gerard's Bend or down the back straight, but on the lefthander in Esses the outfit skittered across the trackside grass, through the straw bales and into the Armco. I was spectating there at the time and can still remember the atmosphere of hushed anxiety as the St John Ambulance men stretched him away.

The Vincent engine was back with Prof Smith and sat idle until Andy Cavalot negotiated a swap, his concours Clubman Viper Velo for the Vincent lump. In a subsequent careful rebuild a Mark Two camshaft, which is a pretty racy item in itself, went in and the two Amal GP carbs were replaced by 34mm Mk 2 Concentrics. The standard bottom end was polished ('No need to alter it - these engines are built like a brick outhouse,' is Mr Cavalot's plain speaking explanation) all bearings were replaced and a compression plate got the ratio down to a road useable 9 to 1. The pistons are low expansion Omega products, allowing a two and a half thou skirt clearance, which also means rather quiet running.

The cylinder heads, already gas flowed, were given a finishing lick by Pete Lovell, the rocker gear was polished and lightened and Ron Kemp's O-ring conversion fitted to prevent oil collecting on the lower of the Vincent's unique two-per-valve guides and the consequent smoking. 'Superb design - very effective. Ron Kemp is the best,' says Andy which is quite a tribute from a man so fussy about what he puts on and in his precious bikes.

The Wideline Featherbed chassis wears Cavalot's own design of swinging arm, box section and wide enough to take a noticeably fatter back tyre than stock Nortons usually wear, but to get the chain line right he resorted to the narrow final drive chain that characterised the early Featherbed Dommie. The swinging arm itself is mounted on twin double row bearings, a much stronger arrangement than the original; it's also two inches longer than the stock Norton item, which takes the wheelbase out



to a very stable 59 inches. What's that in centimetres, or kilometres, or whatever's the fashion? No idea – this is a truly British bike and its sizes come in olde fashioned English. The chassis, both Norton and Cavalot parts, has been nickel plated. I don't normally like Featherbeds in any colour but black, but this one does look really tasty, complementing that great brute of an all-alloy V-twin.

Getting a big Vincent motor and gearbox into the Featherbed is normally achieved by cutting something, most commonly the rear nearside lug, to get the lump into a cradle designed to accommodate a vertical twin or more traditional single. But cutting bits off a Vincent unit is regarded as close to sacrilege and carries the risk of a visit from the Preservation of Perfect Vincent Virginty Squad, who will beat you with forged fork legs and condemn you to ten years riding a sidevalve 250 Indian Brave. Andy Cavalot has no wish to suffer such a terrible fate, so put his brain into gear and came up with the neatest solution I've ever seen to the problem. He slotted the lug, so that it fits snugly over the frame fillet and at the same time the swinging arm pivot in the Vincent gearbox lines up with the pivot mounts on the Featherbed. Neat. Very neat.

Down around that same area are the sort of beautifully turned folding footrests that you don't buy off anyone's shelf; hollow alloy with knurled surfaces and a spring-mounted ball to locate them firmly but gently in the up or down position. Does that seem over the top for what is really a very fundamental piece of hardware? Well, you can have footrests dreary and dull, nicely done,

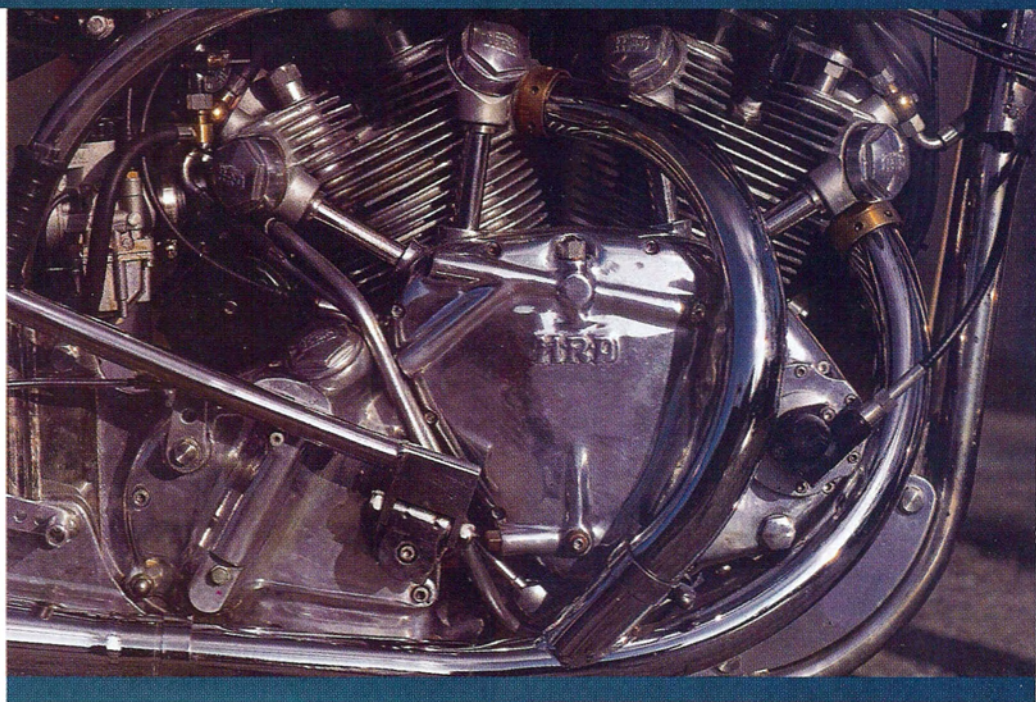
**Getting a big Vincent motor and gearbox into the Featherbed is normally achieved by cutting something**

or exquisite. I prefer the exquisite sort. Just don't expect to buy a set at your local jumble and get change from a fiver. And to stir the workings of what is basically a Black Lightning specification motor into action, there's a Cavalot-designed folding kickstart that could double up as a serious offensive weapon if you unbolted it and swung it around your head. But it's a serious Vincent-starting piece of kit and Midland Classic Bikes sold five of them at the NEC. Apparently they

ran a security check and none of them was bought by a known mugger or professional assassin. So there's another market still to tap, then.

For the other physical extremities, there's a set of lovely looking Tomaselli clip-ons and twistgrip, Amal control levers and Commando speedo and revcounter. This whole bike is absolutely bloody right looking.

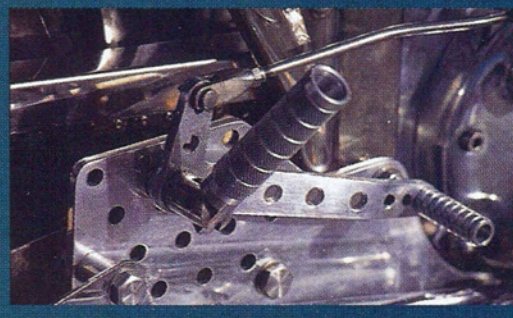
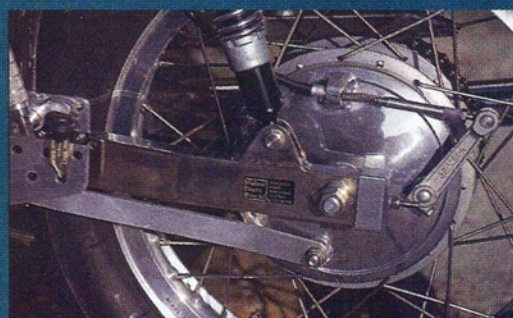
The chance to ride it came after *CBG's* very own photographer Simon had got all excited and laid down in the muck of a Walsall car park to get some dramatic shots. Andy Cavalot kicked it into life, swung a long leg over the saddle of his own Egli-Vincent and sat there waiting while I warmed the motor and finally found the rear set footrest and hoiked the gear

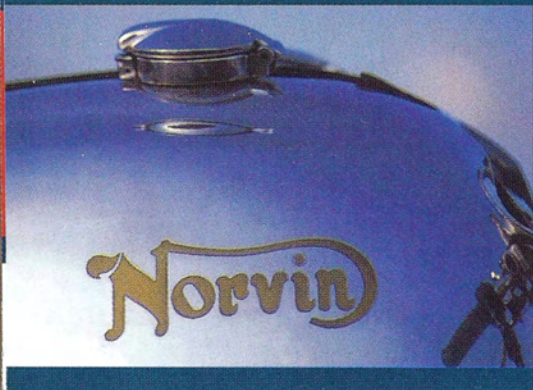


*Above: To get Vincent's wonderful twin into a Featherbed without savaging it, you slot the rear driveside lug and fit it over the frame fillet. The Vincent and Norton swinging arm mounts are then in the same plane. The essence of genius is simplicity.*

*Below: GriMeCa rear hub fits happily into box section swinging arm, which also accommodates serious Avon rubber.*

*Bottom: Timing side footrest folds up to make room for the kickstart's arc of operation.*





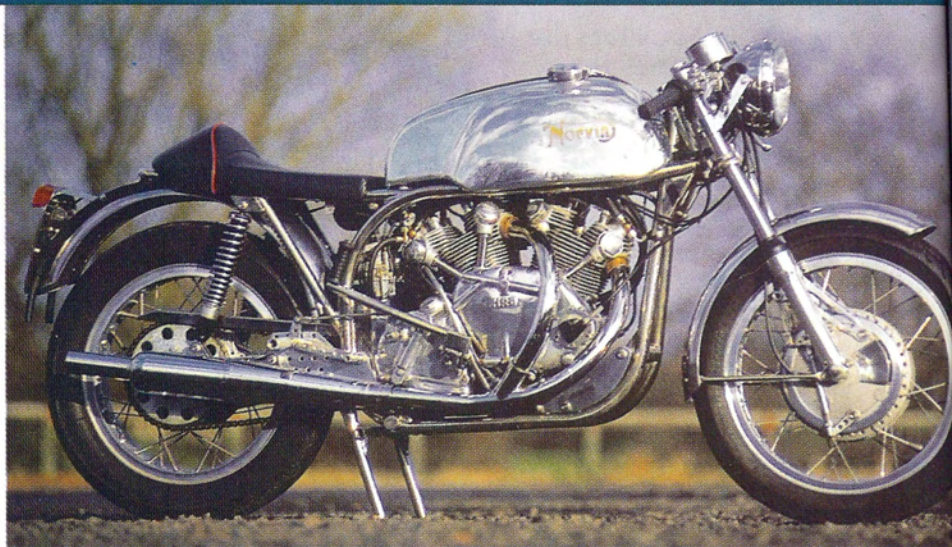
lever into first. The standard Vincent servo clutch took up the drive in a progressive way and I wobbled out of the gravel-surfaced car park and onto a busy road.

One thing you do not have to worry about with a bike like this is filtering into urban traffic from a side road – you wait for a reasonable gap and feed in the clutch as that big Vincent twin feeds great big oodles of torque to the back wheel and you drive forward.

Look, I ride a pretty rapid modern machine and I've twice been let loose on a Yamaha R1, the current must-have sports bike to end all sports bikes. But let me tell you that nothing, but nothing in my experience, launches you forward like a well sorted Vincent twin. This might be a 1947 (!) engine, but in 1999 it's up there with what I know of the best. It's because it has these funny old things called flywheels, so you get the revs up to barely 2000rpm and impetus gets hold of the motorbike and introduces it to this thing called acceleration.

Let me tell you that revs into the five-figure band are not essential to rapid movement, not if you have Mr Vincent's meisterwerke pulling you along. Outside lane, deafen all those Sunday afternoon bumblerers with a throttle slightly more open than really necessary, and just ride past all the mind-numbered buggers until you get to the roundabout, then change down into first for a cautious approach... And find that the damned thing goes into neutral and the leverage of small leg compared with large leg for which it was designed doesn't help you get into gear. Hmmm. Into roundabout on busy Sutton Road with the road slick from this morning's frost and one Norvin in neutral. OhMyGod time.

The solution is to stand up on the footrests and get a firm foot under



the gearlever to lift it into first. The roundabout is taken with reasonable control re-established, the Featherbed as stable as you'd expect, but with its wheelbase out to the Commando's standard 59 inches it has slightly less flickability, but greater stability on long, gentle bends. And that's under a lot more power than the Benchmark British Chassis was ever designed to handle. The drive out of a very slow 360 degree turn is quite, quite wonderful. I actually tried doing one turn in second with a little clutch assistance and it was just the same, flexible power hauling one rather noisy Very British Motorcycle past Sunday commuter traffic with complete ease.

This bike is a two wheeled Delilah, offering temptation into total physical absorption on two wheels. If it was tailored for my physical dimensions, which would mean the gearchange operating up and down its four-ratio range from a normal sitting position, I could actually be tempted. Subject to the bank manager accepting my ageing body as security of course. Hmmm, perhaps I'll opt for a C15...

It didn't fit me, but this is one very tasty, serious motorcycle. I think I'll join one of those National Lottery syndicates and wait for the dream to arrive.

Corrrrrr....

**Above Left: Fuel tank is in 14 gauge alloy, peerlessly shaped by Asa Moyce of Bartel. Skill isn't dead yet, you know.**

**Below: Andy Cavalot is a big lad, built in the Ogri mould. So the Norvin fits him just right.**

