



The sorry looking state of the Norvin before Garry started work



# Norton meets Vincent

Created in seven short months, Garry Laurence's immaculately engineered Norvin 500 was a worthy runner-up in the Classic Bike of the Year competition

BY ALAN SEELEY PICTURES BY JOHN NOBLE

**Bike** 1950 Norvin 500  
**Owner** Garry Laurence  
**Years owned** One year seven months  
**Restoration finished** March 2004

**G**ood things, we're told, come to those who wait, even if we don't always get what we originally wanted. Metropolitan police staff sergeant Garry Laurence, began his quest for a Vincent more than 15 years ago. He fancied a twin, and went to view one in bits close to his home in Kent. It was owned by a Vincent Owners' Club member called John Curtis. But the two couldn't agree on a price and Garry walked away from the deal. He viewed a couple of other Vincent twins, but with the prices that even rough bikes were commanding, decided to abandon his plans for the time being.

Last year, Garry decided to investigate whether the original Vincent was still for sale. The problem was, he couldn't remember where John lived. One day he took a fuel tank to a local repairer, who happened to know where to find the elusive Mr Curtis. The twin had long been sold. A disappointed Garry was just about to leave John's house, when something made him enquire whether John had any other bikes he might like to sell. Garry remembered, from his last visit, a rough Vincent 500 single in a Norton Featherbed frame. Sure enough it was still there, in the back garden, attached to a



sidecar and looking very sorry for itself. It had an ill-fitting Matchless oil tank, lashings of black paint around the engine and Norton laydown gearbox, and a host of other rough and ready features. "It had been built back in the days when these things were done on the cheap, but I could see the potential," says Garry. "The bike started life as a Norton single, bought new by John in fifties. He'd grafted in the Vincent engine at least 20 years ago. I made John an offer and left him to consider. Later that day he rang to accept it."

And so began the story of Spirit of the Sixties II, the stunning special that Garry

created in seven short months from very unpromising beginnings and made the last ten in *Classic Bike's* Classic Bike of the Year reader poll. Spirit of the Sixties II? That's right Spirit of the Sixties I is a glorious Triton which will already be familiar to regular *CB* readers. It was featured in the August 2002 issue.

Eager to see if his new acquisition would at least run, Garry stripped out the old wiring and rigged up a six volt ignition system. He checked the oil in the Matchless tank, and was surprised to find that it was clean. It turned out that the engine had been rebuilt and not used since. With the fuel tank cleaned

out and filled with fresh petrol, the motor fired up easily.

Suitably encouraged, Garry chucked away most of the bike, retaining only the engine, gearbox and frame. Then he had to decide what to do next. "I thought long and hard between building a flat-track style special or a cafe racer. As you can see I went for the latter. I'd never seen a Comet engined featherbed before, although I'm sure they must have been built. When you build a special, you need to have a detailed picture in your mind of what it will look like at the end. The time to build that detailed picture is at the start, and not ▶



half way through. Having never seen a Norvin single before, I'd nothing to go on. So the spec I came up with included Manx Norton tanks and seat, a belt primary drive, electronic ignition, Manx style wheels, chronometric clocks, swan-neck Manx clip-ons, and a high-level two-inch exhaust pipe. And the whole bike had to be finished in black and silver. I wanted to evoke that whole spirit of the Sixties, as I do with all my bikes."

With his mission statement in place, Garry set to work. Even though he's been a copper for 22 years, Garry, now 52, spent the first 15 years of his working life in engineering, primarily maintaining trucks and coaches. So he did have some prior knowledge of spannering.



Engine plates were cut with a jig saw

But he's keen to point out that with care and patience, anyone can build a good special. His own workshop contains only basic tools, no fancy engineering equipment.

"It would have been easier to cut the engine and frame gusset plates with a bandsaw, but I only have a jigsaw. First I made cardboard templates then transferred them onto dural and cut the plates oversize at first. Then I finished them to size, and before drilling measured many, many times. You have to do this – unwanted holes look terrible. I deliberately designed the plates to drop the engine as low as possible in the frame. With those made up, I turned my attentions to the head steady and gusset plates," says Garry.

Having set his heart on a belt primary, Garry knew that this would be no off-the-shelf purchase, being that it had to mate a Vincent engine to a Norton laydown gearbox. He enlisted the advice of transmission specialist Tony Hayward, and the solution came in the form of a BSA front pulley machined to fit the Vincent spline and an adapter that would allow the Norton gearbox to carry a Triumph four-spring clutch. The chaincases had to be machined away on the inside to give clearance for the belt, and a distance piece made up to go between the crankcase and inner chaincases because the centrelines of the gearbox and engine are different, not having been designed to go together. Then the chaincases had to be moved back and tilted upwards at the rear to accommodate the clutch.

Where all the black paint had preserved the engine and gearbox castings, it also concealed

## WHAT'S IT LIKE TO RIDE?

## Norvin on the road

*Alan found riding a well put together special like Garry's Norvin 500 a complete joy*



*Garry's patience and perfectism allowed him build a Sixties cafe racer special in his basic Kent based workshop*

a load of fibreglass where the previous owner had ground through the Norton gearbox to make it fit. Garry had that, and the chaincases, welded up by a local engineering firm then polished the repaired and modified items. He also polished a host of new stainless fasteners. Glass bead blasting gave a new finish to the engine and gearbox.

With the engine in the frame, Garry went to Campbell Geometric to have the 2in exhaust pipe made up in stainless. Meanwhile the petrol and oil tanks and the seat were built by a publicity-shy firm local to Garry. Their standard of quality shows why they don't have to tout for work.

He deluged the Norton short Roadholder forks to make them look like Manx items, overhauled them and made up his own mudguard Y-plates. Then Garry had his local engineers machine down a BSA/Triumph 1968-70 TLS brakeplate to fit a later conical

Approaching Garry Laurence's Norvin from any angle, you can appreciate his obsession with detail and line. Check out that swooping 2in exhaust, or the centre-stand shaped to follow the kinks at the back of the lower frame rails, and retained by a stainless clip so it doesn't bang around. Aeroquip hoses, routed so that the minimum is on view, and wiring secreted inside the frame, add to the clean lines.

I could forget that I'm here to ride the thing. Garry's nervous and so am I. It's a freezing winter day and Kent's suburban roads are slippery and traffic-packed. And it's just started to rain. At least Garry's tactic of keeping polished parts to a minimum means that the inevitable clean-up job after my ride shouldn't be too taxing.

I insert the key into the Manx-a-like yoke-mounted ignition barrel, a Yamaha item, and switch it on. Over compression, a couple of swings on the kickstart and the 28mm Mikuni carb sucks hungrily then the motor bursts into raucous life, even despite the baffles in the 2in pipe. A couple of blips on the Tommaselli Super Pratic throttle and the chronometric rev counter does its relaxed thing.

Garry had warned me that I might struggle a little with the riding position

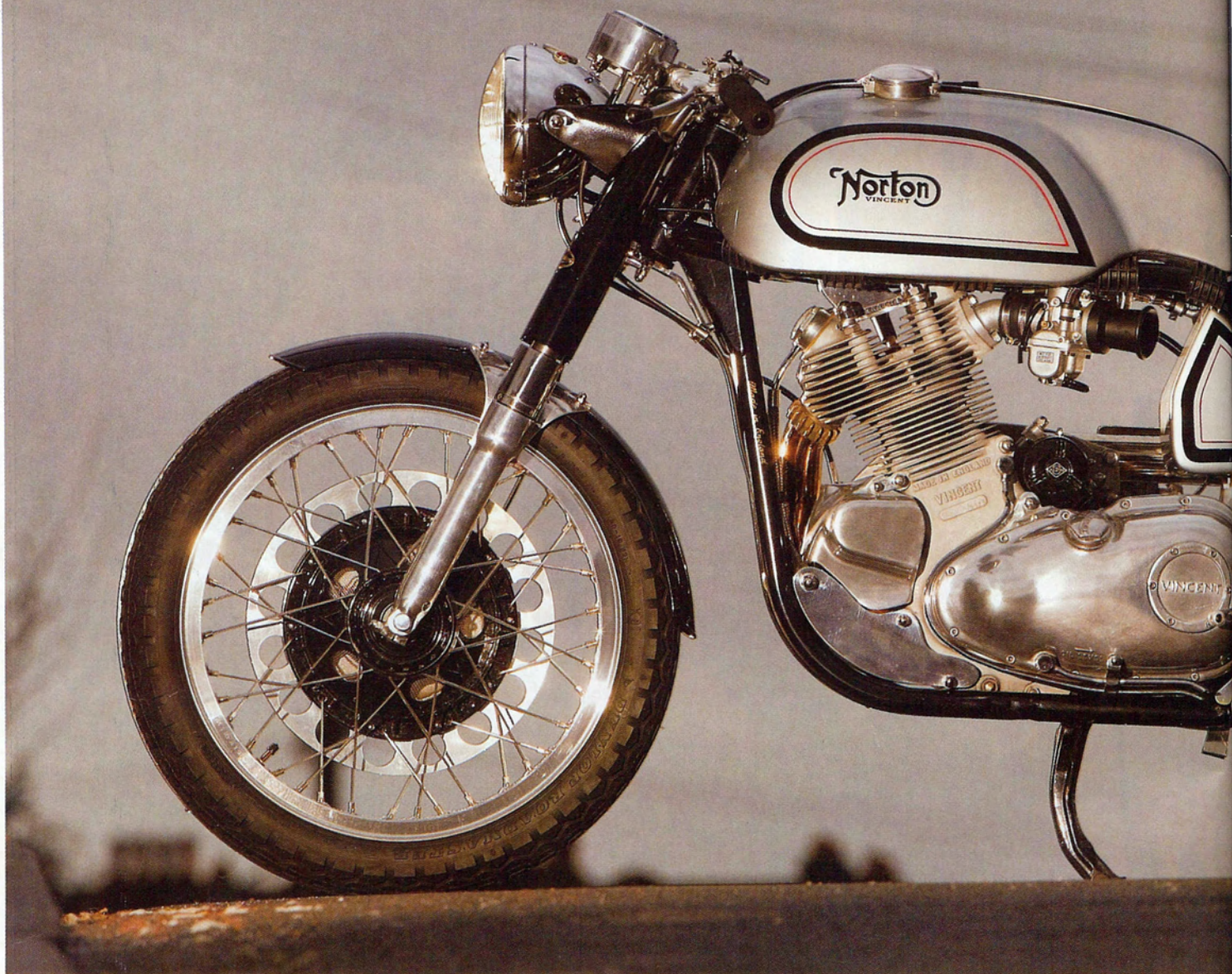
and rearsets. The bike is very much tailored for him and he's a slightly shorter than me. I'm reasonably used to rearset-equipped Featherbeds, so the small distance between seat and footpeg wasn't a problem, especially as Garry had raised the subframe a little. My only difficulty was with the John Barleycorn gearshift lever, which was sized to fit Garry's size eights. My Goldtop-shod size 10s needed a little more thought for accurate shifts, especially with the long-travel Norton gearbox.

The joy of riding a well put together special like this is the way the parts work in harmony. You go for the clutch and you're expecting the feel of a Vincent, but of course in this case you get the familiar easiness of a Triumph. When it comes to handling, with that Comet motor under you, you expect that 'long' feel that Vincents seem to me to have, instead you get taut Norton.

And the brakes are a revelation. The efficient '68-'70 BSA/Triumph twin leader is working at its very best thanks to shoes being machined to fit the conical drum when the brakeplate was turned down.

The Norvin's easy, assured air in dreadful conditions promise a fantastic riding experience on dry, twisty roads. To look at and to ride, a truly awesome and inspiring special.

*A bad day to ride a wonderful bike. Seeley tiptoes through suburban Kent*



**SPECIFICATION**

**1950 NORTON/VINCENT 500**

▼ ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

type	air-cooled ohv single
capacity	499cc
bore x stroke	84 x 90mm
compression ratio	7.3:1
lubrication	dry sump
carburation	28mm Mikuni
primary/final drive	belt/chain
clutch/gearbox	dry multiplate/four-speed
electrics	12 volt. Electronic ignition

▼ CHASSIS

frame	steel duplex, welded
front suspension	telescopic fork
rear suspension	swinging arm/twin shock
brakes front/rear	8in t/s drum/7in s/s drum
wheels	wire spoke/steel rims
tyres front/rear	3.60 x 19in/4.10 x 19in

▼ DIMENSIONS

dry weight	360lb/163kg
seat height	30in/762mm
wheelbase	55½in/1410mm
fuel capacity	4 ¼ gallons/17 litres

▼ PERFORMANCE

top speed	100mph (est)
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hub – back to that Manx look again. He also used a conical hub for the rear. Different bearings allowed the standard Norton spindle to be used with the addition of some spacers. JH Motorcycles took care of powder coating.

Garry found the bolt-up-type subframe on the early Featherbed too low for the seat and mudguard so he rewelded it in the right position and tacked on brackets for the horns and clips for the hoses.

Things were coming together, but Garry advises caution at this stage: “It’s easy to start to rush things, but I completed a dry build before any painting, powder coating or plating. With everything rebuilt, renewed and refinished it was time for the final assembly. You really must take your time here as all the hard work can be spoilt by the slip of a spanner. Reassembly took me three days, taking it easy.”

And we’re glad Garry took the time to take his time. This is a fantastic, unique special that displays exquisite attention to detail. As the man himself says: “Do it properly or not at all is my philosophy.” ●



Ignition has Yamaha lock



Shrunk on cooling fins

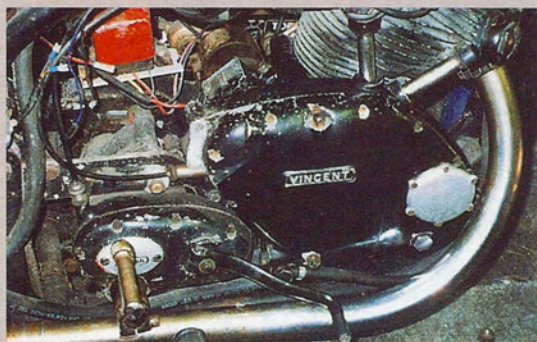


Belt drive is hidden in modified Vincent case

Garry has achieved the perfect  
Sixties cafe racer look with  
his 1950 Norvin 500



## RESTORATION TIMELINE



**Before.** What it looked like in September 2003

- Sept 03** Garry acquires bike, finds the motor to have been rebuilt and not used. Then he discards everything bar the frame, engine and gearbox. Draws up a personal specification for his Norvin cafe racer. He won't deviate from this plan.
- Oct 03** Engine plates made by Garry, followed by the headsteady and gusset plates.
- Nov 03** Primary belt drive system developed with the help of Tony Hayward. Chaincases adapted. Gearbox shell repaired and all bushes and bearings replaced. Garry has kickstart and selector shaft adapted to take O rings for fewer leaks. Campbell Geometric make pipe.
- Dec 03** All engine and gearbox nuts, bolts and studs replaced with stainless. Engine and gearbox treated to Aeroquip hoses and polished.
- Jan 04** Frame modified – subframe moved, extraneous lugs removed, new ones welded on. Platform for central 'elephant's foot' oil tank fabricated. Fuel and oil tanks and seat ordered.
- Feb 04** Hubs and brakeplates modified by JH Motorcycles, who also powder coated the hubs and built the wheels. Bike dry built then disassembled. Parts sent to painters and platers.
- Mar 04** Final assembly. Garry makes his own wiring loom, soldering all bullets and connectors. Then it's off for an MoT. Careful planning of the build means only three faults show up: a too short cable means the speedo doesn't work; too much rearset play hampers the gearshift, so a reversed lever is fitted; and the centrestand clip has to be modified to make it stay up.

## The people who helped

### ● Carbs

**Allens (01379 586728)**  
Supplied 28mm Mikuni carb. Garry had the manifold supplied with the carb machined down to fit the original Vincent inlet stub.

### ● Alternator

**Alton (00 33 298283575)**  
Alternator to replace dynamo.

### ● Paint

**Bike Craft (01580 765578)**

### ● Wheels

**JH Motorcycles (01923 242908)**  
Brake modifications, powder coating and wheel building.

### ● Rearsets

**John Barleycorn (01379 586728)**  
Rearset specialists.

### ● Primary drive

**Tony Hayward (01244 830776)**  
Primary belt drives.

### ● Fasteners

**Modern Screws Bexley (01322 553224)**

### ● Electrics

**Norvin Centre (01708 470526)**  
Ignition components (Type D distributor, Boyer etc). Rev counter drive.

### ● Clocks

**AE Pople (01252 835353)**  
Converted a chronometric speedo to rev counter, overhauled speedo. Both clocks mounted by Garry in Commando binnacles with custom-made ally discs to enclose the bottoms.

### ● Chrome

**Slade Green Plating (0208 691 8406)**

### ● Parts

**Vinparts (01597 851542)**  
Vincent spares specialists.  
**Conway Motors (01622 820635)**  
Spares and advice

## How to enter



**Time to start thinking about your entry for next year's competition**

Got your eye on the 1000 guineas prize for next year's restoration of the year? Then now's a good time to start taking your 'before' and 'during' pictures and planning so that your bike is finished by the September 2005 deadline. We will be featuring more of 2004's shortlisted bikes in future issues. Look out for more details on how to enter next year's Classic Bike of the Year competition.