

# Café Racers-The People Keeping the Naked Bike Spirit Alive

By Linda Wilsmore

Garry Laurence is winner of the first Ace Café London Café Racer Concours Competition, held at the 2008 Race Retro Show in England. Garry talks about his 1000cc Manx Norvin "Spirit of the Sixties 3", which has been described as "Automotive Pornography" & "Art On Wheels".

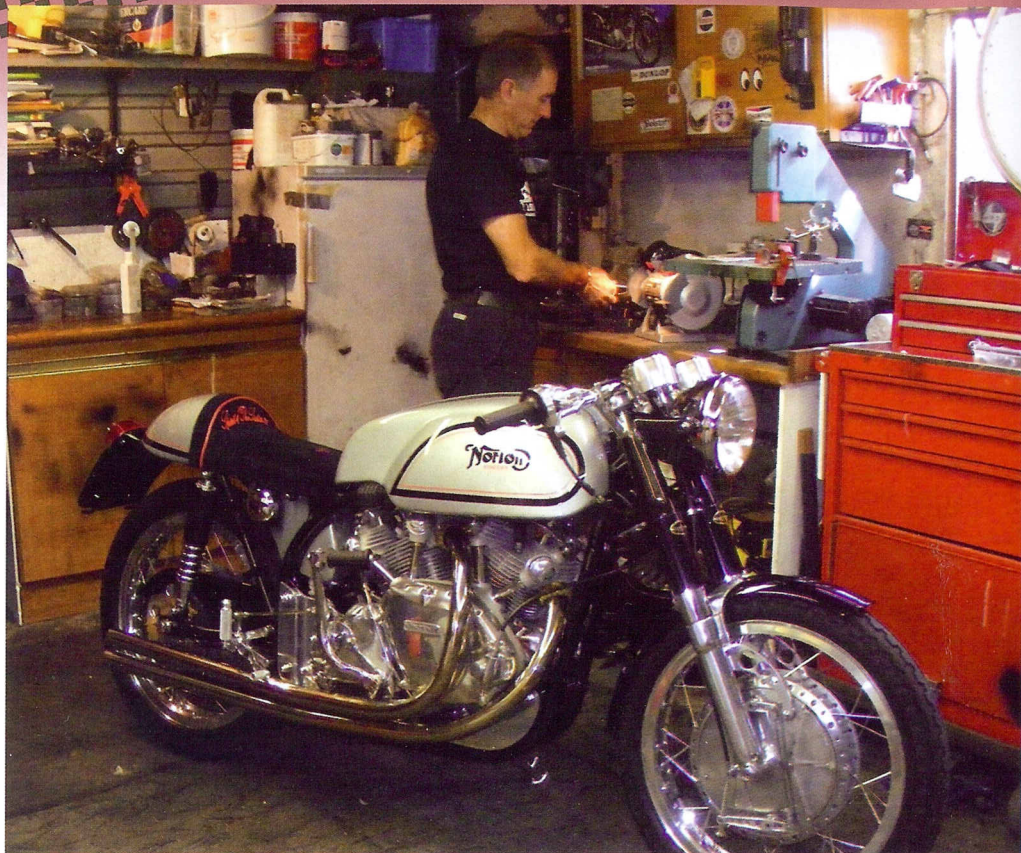


Linda Wilsmore



# Café Racers-The People Keeping the Naked Bike Spirit Alive

Continued



**CR:** When did you return to building Specials?

**GL:** I returned to building specials in 2002 and by 2005 I had built two of the three specials so far. The bikes are named "Spirit of the Sixties" and the first was a unit construction Triton, the second, a 500cc Norvin. I hadn't managed to find a 1000cc Vincent engine up to this point, but I still had my sights on the ultimate prize, a 1000cc Norvin Café Racer designed and built to rival any that had been built before.

**CR:** So what was the way forward?

**GL:** In 2006 I decided for various reasons to build a new engine. A good friend of mine, John Wyatt, who owns the Norvin Centre, supplied all the casings, heads, barrels, crank and engine parts to build a completely new engine. I funded the engine build by selling the Triton, because today's prices for anything Vincent is outrageous and I am not in the business of making do.

While the engine was being built, which required a specialist machine shop for all the extra milling and fitting, I concentrated on the rolling chassis. I completed all the design modifications to the frame, and the rolling chassis was completed with Manx

forks, TZ Yamaha racing brakes front and rear, swan-neck clip-ons, rearsets, etc. all designed or restored by myself. I picked up the completed engine with twin plug heads and BTH twin spark electronic ignition, but minus carburettors and alternator. All the cases were sand cast so the outer covers had to be removed for polishing. It's a filthy job and I don't enjoy doing it but the final outcome is worth it. Carburettors, twin 32mm Concentric, Alton alternator and rev counter drive were added completing the engine.

CR: Sounds like we're getting to the hard part?

GL: Yes, I placed the engine in the frame and spent hours looking at it, considering whether to machine off the swingarm lug cast into the rear of the cases to get the best fit. This is the best way in my opinion to get the engine to fit properly otherwise the engine position is dictated by the position of the swingarm lug. Now this is thought to be sacrilege on a Vincent engine by Vincent enthusiasts and being a Vincent owner myself I can understand that point of view. Off came the lug, which meant I could position the engine in the frame for optimum weight/centre of gravity position as well as looks. I then made the engine plates to suit. This also ensured that the engine sat squarely in the frame and not off-centre. I had to alter the top frame rail to allow removal of the valve cap to do the tappets once the engine is installed. I cut a crescent moon shape out of the frame rail and bronze welded it back in, reversed. Anyone who has built a Norvin will tell you that the rear sets are a headache, and I was determined to design out any problems. To that end, I shortened the kick starter by two and a half inches and modified late Triumph footrest hangers to suit. I used Barleycorn foot pegs and levers to complete the set up.

With the engine in place I had the seat, petrol/oil tanks and chain guard made, which took about six weeks. Steve, the tank builder, cursed me a few times as I would not compromise on design. John at Campbell Custom Exhausts had made the 2" straight through pipe for my 500 Norvin and was an obvious choice. I designed the exhaust pipes using foam pipe taped into position and John made the pipes to this design. 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 Bike Craft did the painting and Gary at Blackbird Leathers made the seat that he

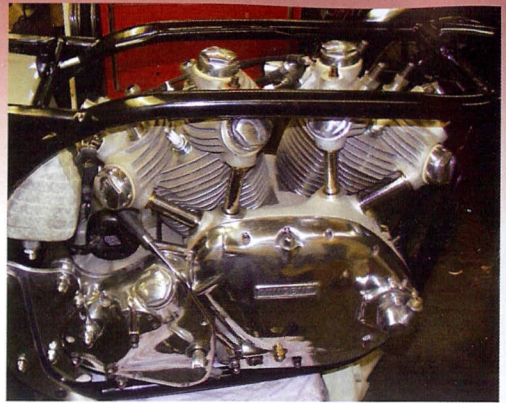


embroidered with the name of the bike 'Spirit of the Sixties 3.' The lighting is direct with no battery. Power is fed through a Boyer power box located under the hump on the seat. During assembly my worst nightmare came true: I managed to dent the petrol tank, so it was back to Phil for a repaint. Apart from burning the midnight oil to the early hours the final assembly went off with no other hiccups.

# Cafe Racers - The People Keeping the Naked Bike Spirit Alive

Continued

For more info visit:  
[www.norvin-spiritofthe60s.com](http://www.norvin-spiritofthe60s.com)



CR: Was it worth all the time and effort?

GL: Finally the day dawned to start the bike up. The engine, being new, was very tight and did not kick over easily, but after ten minutes or so it fired up and ran very well. The ride is nothing less than sensational and was worth all the long nights and money. It handles and brakes like it's on rails. The power from the Shadow spec engine is gut-wrenching - it just keeps pulling and pulling. The noise from the exhausts is raucous to say the least and needs to be kept under control in built up areas; even so it sets off car alarms. Not funny at six in the morning.

This motorcycle fulfils a lifetime ambition and for me is the ultimate café racer. Others will be the judges of that, but it makes me smile every time I ride it. It's anti social, it's noisy, but it evokes memories of yesteryear for me, and those who remember how things used to be.

One guy summed the bike up, "That's automotive pornography, mate". Well you may agree or not, but for anyone who was part of the bike scene in the sixties/early seventies and part of the bike café culture - The Ace, Johnson's, The Salt Box or any of the many others - it is.

