

MOTORCYCLING LEGENDS

2 ANYONE FOR AN EARLY BATH?

— Triumph 21 restoration.

6 JENKS

It wasn't all beer and skittles . . .

8 "MY REPUTATION IS YOUR GUARANTEE"

— Claude Rye, a man of his word.

12 A VERY SPECIAL MANXMAN INDEED

— Phil Heath on the four-valve 350.

15 THE BEST LAID SCHEMES . . .

Ted Ulrich on Howard Davies.

16 ITALIAN FIDDLES AREN'T ALL WOODEN ONES!

More from Bill Lomas.

19 WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T MENTION MORGANS!

The remarkable life of Geoff Godber-Ford.

22 A BROTH OF A BHOY

Looking back on Reg Armstrong.

27 BEWARE OF LOW-FLYING MOTORCYCLES

— ridden by works Norton scrambler Ted Ogden.

30 WALTER NOT FIRST AT THE ALTAR

— a colourful visit to Austria's Zeltweg circuit.

34 NOT JUST AN OTHER OLD AJAY . . .

— no indeed. There are Guthrie connotations.

36 AN IRISH CAMEO

— a glimpse inside an enthusiast's album.

39 NEVER LOOK BACK . . .

— The racing recollections of Chris Conn.

43 FLOG, BUY OR BARTER

— Your free adverts service.

44 GIVE IT STICK!

— a colourful look-back at the Bonanza.

46 DEAR GORDON . . .

— Your letters.

49 THE TOM KIRBY STORY PART 3

— The little man with the big heart.

52 1952 DOUGLAS 80 PLUS PIN-UP

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ANYONE FOR AN EARLY BATH?

Words and pictures by David Hawtin.



If you're going to have one, have a big one!", advised Dick Rudkin's friends when they heard he was thinking of a Triumph. But Dick was determined to get a Twenty One because he'd fancied one while young.

Introduced in 1957, the Twenty One (later 3TA) was Triumph's first unit construction model. The Twenty One had an advanced specification, when compared to contemporaries in the 350 class. And it cost only £217. An almost identical 500cc (5TA) version was introduced the following year, using the same cycle parts. Only the engine's top end was different.

The most striking aspect of the new 350 twin was the partial enclosure of the machine's rear half. The 'bathtub' soon spread to other Triumph models, and was complemented by a large and deeply valanced front mudguard. Although sensible features in themselves, these parts were usually the very first to be chucked away by owners who wanted racier lines.

Fortunately, Dick's 1958 Twenty One hadn't been butchered. He spotted the bike in a local newspaper in May 1992.

"It seemed well looked after and substantially original, but there were a few things obviously wrong. It was the incorrect colour, the carburettor was a Concentric, not a Monobloc, and the rear

shockers had external springs which were so long that the bike wouldn't sit on its centre-stand!"

It was a runner when bought and seemed mechanically sound, so Dick's first priority was to have it re-painted in the correct colour scheme. This was entrusted to a friend — Dave Mills — whose immaculate '57 Trophy (see "Legends" No. 23) is proof enough of his skill. Dave's first move was to strip the 'tin-wear' back to bare metal.

"There was obviously a lot of filler in the lower part of the 'bathtub', but we found that all the steel was there underneath — it just needed re-shaping. But there were 36 holes in the rear enclosure and front mudguard!

"What was left of the rear guard was solid, but the forward end had rotted away. I bought a pattern replacement, but that was shoddy, so Dave made up a new section and welded it onto the original."

The cycle parts were then etch-primed before being sprayed with Mitsubishi Pacific Blue (cellulose), which is the nearest easily-available match for Triumph's original Shell Blue Sheen.

The bike passed the MoT without difficulty, and was back on the road within a month.

Although the tidied Twenty One looked presentable, Dick aimed for a concours standard of restoration. So he took the bike off the road in



CLASSIC LEGENDS
Triumph 21



Many preferred the look of the pre-units but this is a clean, smooth design.

November 1992, and this time the cycle parts were stripped-down completely.

The frame was in fairly good condition, and was simply rubbed down and then sprayed with black polyurethane enamel, while the bodywork received a second going-over with the Mitsubishi blue.

The swinging-arm was re-bushed, and the front fork seals renewed twice, after the first — pattern — set had leaked almost immediately. The Dunlop rims were re-chromed, and the wheels rebuilt by Alan Foster of Clacton using stainless spokes, left un-polished, so they look quite acceptable.

Girling-lookalike dampers (actually of Dot manufacture) were supplied by Hamrax. The brake shoes had plenty of 'meat' left on them and were retained. However, early road tests showed up a tendency for the front brake to judder, cured by skinning the drum.

CLASSIC LEGENDS

The Twenty One's wheels are 17 inches, popular now but not in 1957. Although modern rubber is plentiful in this size, period tread patterns are not. The bike's front tyre is a 3.25 Avon Speedmaster Mk.2, and the rear a 3.50 Avon Supreme, both from Vintage Tyre Supplies.

"The bike had a glass-fibre seat base with an incorrect cover. The pan was twisted, so I replaced it with a new steel pan from an autogumbo stall. It's a good replica and fits well. I was able to re-use the bike's original handlebars and control levers, although these should be plain blades rather than ball-ended.

"The twist-grip had been cut down but fortunately Dave Mills was able to repair it. It seemed worthwhile trying to reclaim the original, as the body was in such good condition."

Although extremely oily, the Triumph's engine had been mechanically quiet, and after examination it was decided that the bottom end would not need attention.

Turner was also good at creating uncluttered handlebars. Which was just as well, because when the weaves started you had to be able to see them.

The bores had already been taken out to 60 thou oversize, so Dick contented himself with having them honed, and fitted new piston-rings. The cast-iron cylinder barrel was then given the correct silver finish.

The head was rebuilt with new valves, guides and springs, and several broken fins were welded by Richard Kimberley of Lawford. Richard also welded up a mysterious hole which had been drilled in the gearbox outer cover. Pre-1961 T21s have no primary chain adjuster, and the slack chain had grooved the inside of the case.

The original exhaust pipes were re-chromed, but the silencers were replaced by a pair of Campbells. A correctly-jetted Amal Monobloc 375 carburettor came from Tony Poulter of Salcott, and sent for re-conditioning to Precision Engineering of Saffron Walden.

Distributor ignition was retained by the 3TA and 5TA until 1964, when the contact-breaker assembly was shifted to the timing cover. Dick obtained a new condenser and points from Tri-Supply of Bournemouth, who also came up with the distributor's distinctive waterproof cover. Not so original was the Triumph's wiring loom, which had been made from multi-core trailer cable. But it was good enough for further use after being tidied up.

The rebuild was completed in April 1993, but it still leaked oil. The rocker boxes were the main problem and their mating surfaces were ground flat. The rocker-shaft ends were given a smear of silicone sealant, and the result was an oil-free engine.

With this and a few other teething problems behind him, Dick now says he's delighted with the bike.

"I admit the performance is not that good, but it is a 35 years old 350. When I'm out with a group of riders on bigger bikes, it can't keep up. They tend to cruise at around 60mph, but this feels happiest at 50-55. I dare say there's plenty more there if I wanted to use it, but I didn't buy the bike to thrash it. One very noticeable peculiarity is how the bike's handling is affected by cross-winds."

The 16.5bhp Twenty One is noticeably less powerful than its (27bhp) 500cc brother, and lacks that most appealing characteristic of the larger Triumph twins, low-down grunt. The gearchange however, is excellent, almost certainly as a consequence of the box having less torque to handle. Dick concedes that the brakes are lacking in power too, and this coupled with the smaller bike's reduced engine braking effect, means that stopping distances need judgement.

The ride is distinctly on the 'lively' side — the front fork seeming under-damped, and the rear units rather too stiff — but the handling is safe and predictable, and no worse than most of the late-1950s opposition. ■



Two examples of Edward Turner's touches of style which gave Triumphs sales appeal — the tidy nacelle and the tank badge.



Engine & other spares:

Tri-Supply, 2 Kemp Road, Winton, Bournemouth BH9 2PW. Tel: 0202 514446.

Alloy & specialised welding:

Richard Kimberley, 88 Hungerdown Lane, Lawford, Essex CO11 2LY. Tel: 0206 230964.

Carburettor:

Tony Poulter, Phillips Cottage, Salcott-cum-Virley, Maldon, Essex. Tel: 0621 860258.

Carburettor reconditioning:

Precision Engineering Services, P.O. Box 36, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4QE. Tel: 0799 528388.

Tyres:

Vintage Tyre Supplies, (at the National Motor Museum), Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, Hants SO42 7ZN. Tel: 0590 612261 Fax: 0590 612722.

Rear suspension:

Hamrax, 328 Ladbroke Grove, North Kensington, London W10 5AD. Tel: 081 969 5380/5655 Fax: 081 960 1993.

Wheel building, polishing, chrome plating:

Alan Foster, 89 Leas Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex. Tel: 0702 713927.