

Overhauling Roadholder Forks

The rebuild of my 1952 Featherbed Inter offered the opportunity to show what to look out for when overhauling Roadholder Forks.

The first image shows fork internals after cleaning.



Fork Stanchions rusty and pitted. These will not only ruin every new oil seal but also all new fork bushes, apart from the fact they have far too much play in them, being worn. My friend Rudi swears in all his years restoring Nortons for a living he has yet to see chromed stanchions on an original pre-Commando Norton. Naturally all Andover Norton fork stanchions are now made from the seamless steel tube specified for the Commando, Norton's fastest twin ever, ground and hard chromed, thus making life for bushes and oil seals much easier!



Another problem are the damper rods and damper caps. Ignored by most restorers, the state of both is fundamental for the hydraulic damping. Whilst many discuss oil grades and where to put certain holes on stanchions, wear and resulting play between rod and cap boycotts the restrictions in damping that should normally be governed by the holes and damper cup at the bottom of the damper body. Instead the oil escapes between rod and cap. Renewing rods and caps is a must for me. I am quite happy with the damping on my Nortons. In fact years ago I took the cartridge Moto Guzzi damping out of our "Family Racer" forks that a friend had put in. The standard production damping I found better than the Guzzi ones.

The damper rods, being heavily corroded, work like a file on the caps that could now be tilted on the rods being visibly enlarged.



That looks better! New rods, new caps. On this very early featherbed- actually the first featherbed Inter ever produced, Earls Court exhibition bike in 1952- the damper bodies are aluminum, not steel.



After cleaning the new fork stanchions inside and out- somewhat more careful than we do before we pack them for despatch- applying a bit of oil, fitting new fork bushes, and putting new fibre washers under the damper bodies the bodies are now inserted in the sliders and fastened. Take care to clean the insides of the sliders, too. One finds the sludge of decades in them. Nobody changes fork oil, ever!

The sliders in this particular case must be re-used as that type is no longer available. Owners of later featherbed models with full-width hubs can buy new sliders if the old ones are worn or damaged.



From the old rotary importer days I have a couple of White Power stanchions left which come in handy for the assembly operations. White Power had a chrome quality problem in the 1990s as you can see, and we exchanged most F1 Sport stanchions at the time under warranty....



First operation is to get the top fork bush into the slider. The WP stanchion acts like a slide hammer....



Then, using one of the old top bushes the wrong way round, the fork oil seal can be carefully slide hammered in without damaging it. Now the oil seal holders can be fitted using a strap wrench.



I was about to put the old fork springs back in with a view of test riding them but thought I should check how they compare in length to new ones.

Putting the two old ones side by side against the window this is what I saw.

I decided there and then to dump them and to put new ones in. The internal fork springs are the same on all featherbed models and the Commando, which had different length damper bodies to compensate, so it was again a routine part from my stores.

In fact all bits used in the rebuild should be available as Genuine Andover Norton Parts from good quality Norton spares outlets.

I took them from my (Norton Motors (Deutschland)) stores- all routine parts for me I sell all the time.

So this is it- both fork legs overhauled, moving parts slightly oiled, ready to be put into the fork yokes. The chassis and all painted parts are promised for the first week of December...



Final note: I have found fork oils from a most reputable manufacturer are about as good as water, no matter what grade. I followed a recommendation from another Norton vintage racer years ago and since used 20 Grade Bel Ray fork oil. It works for me. Actually the only Bel Ray product I specifically buy, use, and recommend.