



Dear Andover Norton Customer,

July was part holiday time, part the typical daily work distributing Norton and Triumph parts to many countries in the world.

My Andover Trip:

It also gave me the opportunity to spend a week in Andover, to see what our team is up to, and to see several people I was keen to meet.

On **Monday** after my arrival, I had a long and informative exchange with our MD Karl about the next plans for our company. We have several projects in the pipeline that we will publish as soon as they have been finalized.

Monday night Mike Jackson, ex-owner of Andover Norton amongst other functions, collected me from my hotel and we had a long dinner in a pub next to the river Tess, swapping stories from our Norton pasts and discussing Norton history and characters, like, say, Kenny Roberts who came to Andover Norton, Goodyear's then importers, and expressed the wish to fish. Mike arranged to rent a piece of the Tess and King Kenny fished for a few hours and caught nothing. Which in turn reminded me of the picture of Kenny on a Mk3 shod with Goodyear tires and Mike with a Goodyear "instant idiot" cap at an odd angle behind him.



Kenny Roberts, Dennis Poore, Philip Sellars, a Norton Director, Mike Cartwright of Goodyear, Mike Jackson who says: "This was the first ever occasion that a goofy-looking MJ had ever worn a baseball cap. He did not know there was an adjustable strap!"

As usual I ended up with what our first MD Nick Hopkins used to call the "Jackson droppings", another pound or two of historical documents, an auction catalogue with results, and various copies of features on famous careers in the old British motorcycle industry, most of whom I met in my time in it.

Most interesting for our archive are the documents from the Jackson/Colquhoun era. Mike Jackson and his then partner Peter Sellars, Philip Sellars' son, bought Andover Norton from Dennis Poore in 1982, threw in with William Coquhoun, who had bought BSA at about the same time, in 1985, and the new "BSA Group" consisting of Andover Norton and BSA bought the Norton spares business from Norton Motors Ltd in Shenstone in 1991. In 1993 they became MZ distributors for the UK which was, I believe, the main reason why they were de facto bankrupt in 1994 and the whole BSA Group was acquired by Regal/Southampton in 1995, thus forming BSA/Regal.

Most documents from this era I had not seen before and they will further complete Andover Norton's extensive archive of old Norton company documents. Thank you, Mike!

On **Tuesday** we had a meeting with Paul Smith and Richard Thomas of the Norton Owners Club who had not seen our operation before. The idea was to make a new start with the Club since mutual relations were somewhat strained after a costly lawsuit. The meeting was friendly and productive and we look forward to an amicable coexistence.

Tuesday night I visited my family's old friends, Marge and Al Tritten in Southampton. Al Tritten was editor of "Roadholder" for many years, I believe for at least a decade, in the 1980s, and my wife and I first met him when he came through Hamburg on a continental trip in 1981 on his Commando and needed a place to sleep. These were the days of the NOC "Emergency Aid List" that gave him my address. Al has a lot of stories to tell, and some are of club affairs at that time.



Marge & Al Tritten as most NOC members remember them from Al's Roadholder editor days.

Wednesday I crawled through the stores of Andover Norton, found a part we thought we did not currently have because it was wrongly identified, did a video interview on Andover Norton's history with our "Social Simon", and in the evening had dinner with our Karl and Phil Albutt, retired MD and friend, which was most enjoyable.

Thursday was travel day as I went up to the middle of nowhere (4

hours drive each way) to see Diane and Richard Negus. Main reason was to see them again, but another one was to ask Richard about the 24-hour-race in Spa, now 50 years ago, the only time a Commando did 24 hours at 100mph+ average.



1972 TT: Tom Waterer, Richard's rider, and the bike's owner and tuner.

Friday back to Munich after a couple of hours at Andover Norton. A good week and I knew the next week I'd have my work cut out after a week's absence from the shop!

50th anniversary of Richard Negus Norton's Spa success:

A side effect of my seeing Richard was to talk about the Spa event in 1973, when his riders had the greatest success in endurance racing of the whole Commando era (!) by making second place to a factory Honda averaging over 100mph for 24 hours under riders Pete Lovell and Pete Davies.



Spa 1972, after the race. Riders Pete Davies and Pete Lovell exhausted but no doubt elated.

Richard admits his memories of particular races are vague, understandable given the time elapsed and the many races he went to with his riders. What he did remember was the specification of the

engine which, he says, was nothing that special: 2S camshaft, skimmed head, standard pistons, lightened valve train.

The really special part, and most probably the reason why the engine lasted, was the crankshaft. This, as opposed to all other crankshafts he had in his engines, had rolled radii at the mainshafts, not ground as is normally the case. If cranks break it is often in this area, and frankly in the nearly five decades I have ridden Commandos I had but two cranks break, both in racing, both at that point.

Richard told me he was given the crank by someone in the factory. Many of the parts he used to build his bikes were “seconds” of parts left over from tests. Why this desirable modification was done only on that one crank, given all race engines should have had cranks like this, is a mystery in retrospect.

Currently a replica of Richard’s bike exists that is often wrongly described as “the Negus Norton”. Richard comments:

“The bike is certainly more fake than original. 850 frame, 850 motor, 850 forks, 850 front & rear wheels, 850 rear fork, etc.,. Some parts are original, oil tank, primary drive, fuel tank, exhaust, but the remainder is new. The owner knows my view on the bike.”

Recently Mick Duckworth contacted Richard about it and writes:

“After my last email to owner Adam, he phoned me and we had quite a long conversation. He was open about his bike's tenuous history and does not seem to be out to deceive anyone, although we did discuss the hazard of machines acquiring 'enhanced provenance' over time, especially if they are approaching an auction house. Adam has (...) gone to some trouble to replicate much of (the) bike's appearance, seeming to have only launched onto the project with replicated stickers etc through enthusiasm. I would class the machine as a 'recreation' or 'tribute' which does give me a platform to write about the 1970s achievements that haven't had much of an airing (eg compared to Beezumph racers).”



Richard's bike in its 1973/750cc form

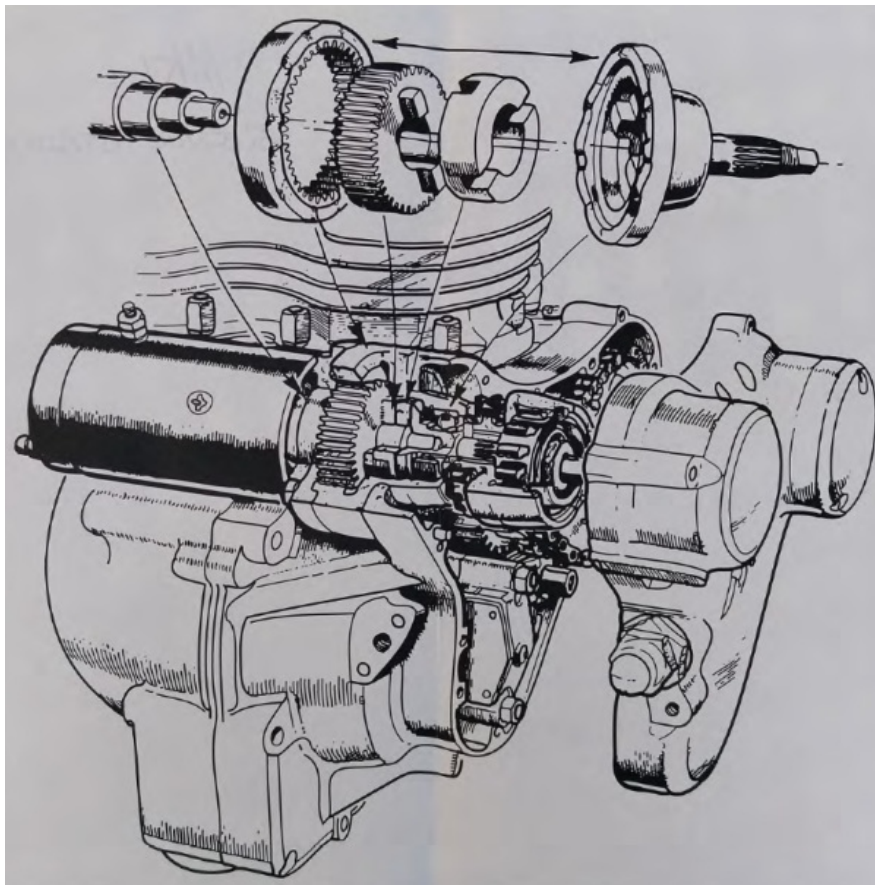
I suspect the reason why this win wasn't widely publicized and used to

promote the Commando was because the JPN works team had a string of ruined engines and lack of success in endurance events, So such a success by what was at the time a privateer and but a draughtsman in the factory didn't meet approval from those higher up in the pecking order. More so since it wasn't the only creditable success of a Negus Norton in racing!

The Mk1 electric starter

Another subject I discussed with Richard was the first attempt at an electric starter for a Commando. I had heard from Bob Rowley years ago it was a disaster, but had never seen pictures.

Imagine my surprise when I recently found in the "Hemmings files" a professional drawing, probably done by John Hancox at the time, of the concept of the first starter:



Asked about his memories of the project Richard promptly answered:

"My very first job when I joined Norton at Andover!"

The basic engineering had been done at Plumstead so all I had to do was make detail drawings of all the parts. What we didn't know was that the epicyclic reduction gear was so inefficient that it would hardly turn the engine even with a car battery attached. Also, when the engine back-fired, it wouldn't turn the starter motor & something had to break; crank pinion, starter chain, all broke at one time or another. Eventually Poore lost patience and instructed that a completely new scheme be drawn, incorporating the anti-backfire device.

By then of course, starter motors were in production in India which is why there are, or were, all those motors with an

eccentric rather than a gear at the drive end. Perhaps I should add that the crankcase already had modifications to the casting specifically for that starter. Hence the triangular steel blanking plate with three fixing screws, all then totally redundant. That plate remained in the specification until the 1972 casting dies came on stream."

Richard at our meeting said he does not remember the second bulge of the timing cover over that starter motor. He suspects this was planned but probably never produced. I also asked Richard again for the reduction between starter and crankshaft, since I remembered an astronomical one, and he wrote:

"If you mean the total reduction from starter motor to crank, then that was 70:1, From the starter motor shaft to output gear, that was 35:1 with a further reduction of 2:1 from intermediate sprocket to crankshaft. The reduction gear in the starter motor is actually called a hypocycloidal gear - but not many people have ever heard of that." Since I had neither I researched it on the net: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH46bpe1cNA>

The other source I asked was obviously Bob Rowley, who I believe was the first who told me of the project. Bob writes:

"(It) nearly made it into production, fortunately, I stayed behind to demonstrate it to Dennis Poore, the powers that shall be nameless had told him in an earlier meeting that it was working fine and showing great promise, Mr. Poore tried it and on the third start it blew the timing cover out and bits fell on the floor. The bosses looking daggers at me.

I recall the bike parked in the outside corridor at Marston Road experimental dept, and I'm sure that the one demonstrated to Poore was a rideable version. Looking through a very old article I also mention that "I heard the telltale signs of a backfire just as Poore had successfully started it three times and just as he turned I clicked the starter and all the bits fell out on the floor."

I still recall Tony Jones experimental dept manager and Tony Dennis looks when earlier in the day I was called into a meeting and said that we've had 100% mechanical failure so far. Sometimes telling the truth was a risky business job-wise."

A few days later I received a mail from Richard: "Amazing what you find when you're looking for something else." And attached was this picture:



Questioned, he replied:

"Yes, that's one of those early starter motors; Russell Motors in London had stack of them. Note the date stamped on the body - 1972."

In retrospect it is obvious the idea to put a starter motor on the "magneto ear" of the Norton twin, while it seemed to lend itself to be used for it, was not the best idea. Given the necessary torque to go through a structure that was never designed to take it, combined with using the old Dommi/early Commando intermediate gear and employing the feeble chain that was to originally just drive a magneto which needs little to turn it, happily combined to no backfire-proof drive, called for disaster. But at least we now know why that triangular plate in the magneto position was introduced!

Pirate Parts (yet again!)

When Paul Smith and Richard Thomas of the NOC came to see us they were surprised to hear Andover Norton do not supply the usual names in the British Norton spares scene any longer. In one case we stopped supply over a decade ago, in the other a few years ago. It does not cease to amaze me the Norton world has not caught on to the fact.

I was reminded when I received a mail from a customer today who asked about the availability of a kickstarter, attaching this picture:



I told him he fell prey to a Chinese pattern part, a casting rather than

our forging. He happily ordered our [04.0434](#) to replace this abominal copy. I have yet to see a forged kickstart crank break, but I have seen several of these imitations give up. In one case it broke mid-stem and the stub remaining on the kickstart shaft drove a nice furrow into the owner's lower leg...

And talking of kickstart shafts, one of the first jobs our Paul Ralph in the workshops had was to rebuild a gearbox with parts brought in by the customer. Paul flatly declined to use the "new, genuine" kickstart shaft because even he, who at the time was not yet conversant with Norton parts or the Norton scene, saw that the shaft in question was totally unacceptable. We then had it analysed and not only were the dimensions incorrect and it wasn't true but the material it was made of was totally unsuitable.

Our Ashley sent me two pictures recently of gearbox layshafts and gear bushes. The pirate parts had cost the customer a gear and as usual, he came to us complaining about the quality of our parts. Which neither was, both were pirate components:



Top our layshaft [06.6666](#), bottom something masquerading as a Norton part.



Gear bushes. On the Right ours, at the left, the pirate one.

Now gearbox failures are potentially deadly since a gearbox that locks up cannot be neutralized by pulling the clutch. The rear wheel inevitably stops instantly. I tend to get emotional about this because my youngest daughter came into the box at Sachsenring many years ago complaining the Commando racer had lost second gear. On inspecting the gearbox that at the time housed a 4-speed close ratio cluster supplied by an English company, we found the layshaft gear in

split in two in the gearbox sump. On analysing it we found the gears had been hardened through, so were brittle as glass. Another pirate part made by non-engineers, and I am still thankful Christine did not have a gearbox seizure.

So remember if it doesn't say "Andover Norton" on the packing and it didn't come from us the part may not be what it seems, no matter what spurious claims are made regarding originality.

No doubt our Paul will amuse you with stories of what he encountered in Norton Motors Ltd's workshop further down,

Our Bikes

Joe:

The 1952/53 Inter:

This weekend I fitted a new master switch since the original one had lost switch lever and its screw during the ride, and also looked after the headlamp that sometimes hesitated to switch to low beam, problems that occurred during our trip.

The other thing was to inspect the carb to check if it was correctly jetted. The bike ran too rich during our trip. I found everything was to the book and also noted I must have overhauled the carb at one time and fitted new needle and needle jet. The needle position is hard to see so I made sure it was second notch as per the book and really cannot say if that is where it was during our trip. The bike runs too rich so I need to ride it again for a day and perhaps put the needle in the lowest position. Unfortunately there is little choice of needle jets available, otherwise I'd go one size down.

The Signal Orange Short-Stroke Roadster:

Reliable as always and the new front brake is a safety feature I'd hate to miss. Having now test-ridden it in all weathers I have asked Ashley to purchase the missing components to offer complete kits.

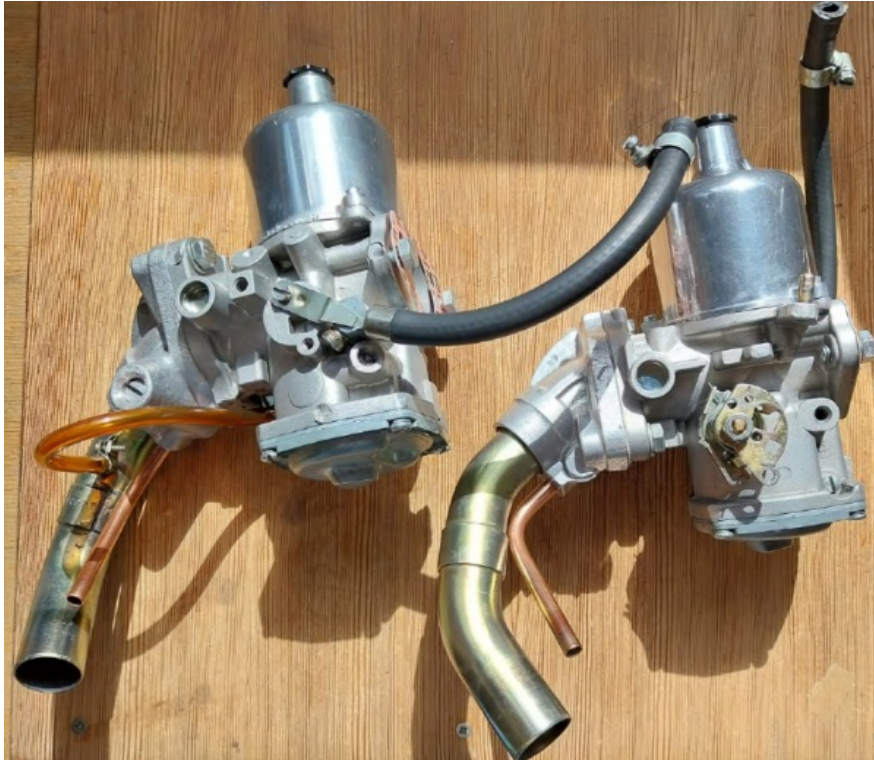
The only fun ride apart from making my trips from home to work longer than necessary was a visit to an Oldtimer meeting about 30 miles away with Guenter and Fast Fraaaanzi, all on our Commandos.



Guenter's "2023 Calendar" 850, my SOR, Fraanzi's trusty 850Mk3 of

The F1Sports alias TT "Lydia":

I got the carbs off just in time to see Paul rebuilding them when I was over. They were badly corroded and some passages blocked with residue. I felt ashamed when I saw the sorry bits he had laid out on the workbench. No great surprise then the poor beast declined to run properly! Paul blames the ethanol in modern fuels and reckons if you refuel with petrol containing little or no ethanol your carb components will thank you for it.



"Lydia's" SU carbs after Paul did his best on them. They never were that clean since 1992!

On this rainy Saturday I put the carbs back on, a nightmare on a fully-faired bike. The trick is to remove the radiator to keep swearing to a minimum, but there are still unapproachable and hard-to-fit items on the assembly, not helped by the anti-heat shroud between the carbs and the engine that has but small cutouts for the inlet and idle tubes. On Sunday, same weather conditions, I put everything else together, in the process taking the front fairing off again four times because I had forgotten/overlooked something. It shows it is thirty years ago now that I used to work on F1s and F1Sports ("TT"s) regularly, being the sole mechanic in my little company and doing all I could to get through emissions approvals resp. looking after the "TT"s of my customers. Early Sunday afternoon all was back together again but the weather conditions, stormy with rain, somewhat dimmed my enthusiasm for a test ride. I will report if all is now well in the next "Source".



Lydia rearing to go but her owner isn't in view of the weather.

Simon

My 1972 Combat 750 restoration is nearly complete!

After ten years riding and 30,000 miles, including through winters, the Commando needed attention, especially cosmetically. In December 2022 it was dismantled and every component checked, refurbished or replaced.

I will cover 500 miles to run it in and find and correct any faults. This Commando will be for sale soon. The buyer can choose either Roadster or Interstate tank and seat. Also the colour of the petrol tank and side panels. Price: £9,950. Details available on request.





Rushall Breakdown!

Riding to work at Andover in August, I slowed down approaching a 'T' junction and heard a mechanical 'clonk' from my 750 Commando. The engine stopped. I pulled in the clutch lever, engaged neutral and coasted to the entrance to a farm grain store. A line of cars followed behind me.

There were clues to the cause of the unusual noise: the kick start lever would not operate. i.e. something was stopping it swinging down. The bike rolled easily in neutral. There was oil dripping from and underneath the drive side cover but not the crankcases or gearbox. I suspected a problem behind the outer primary cover, either a broken chain or loosened clutch centre nut. I had tools to take off the cover but decided not to. I couldn't have fixed the problem at the roadside and didn't want to add more oil to the owners entrance drive.



I was 20 miles from my destination and 20 miles from home. It was 7.25am. I telephoned the AA breakdown service, of which I am a member. Within 75 minutes their van and man arrived. The efficient and helpful Polish technician agreed that an immediate repair was not viable and assembled a trailer platform to be towed behind his vehicle.



Once home I removed the drive side cover to find the crankshaft nut had come undone and jammed against the outer cover. The damage was mercifully light: only the alternator rotor and nut needed replacing. There were some scratch marks to the inside of the cover, that I could live with. The oil loss was caused by the jammed nut forcing apart the inner and outer covers. Later that day I fitted the new parts plus a replacement woodruff key and shakeproof washer, then tightened to the factory recommendation.



I can't be sure why the nut came loose. It was fitted thirteen years/36,000 miles ago and thread locked in place. I probably didn't use a torque wrench as I only used to use one for the cylinder head bolts, which was perhaps (in hindsight) a mistake.

A breakdown is never welcome but when the weather is dry and sunny and the views pleasant, it's sometimes not too bad!



Tales from the Workshop.

July was a busy month for the workshop team again with a mixture of the good and not so good! We are still seeing a steady stream of Rotary bikes and the up and down ones coming in for recommissioning or with tales of engine woes.



I'm really pleased to say that our 652 Combat and Ironing Board prototypes are now both MOT'd and ready for a few miles and shows over the next few months. They are amazing little bikes to ride with absolutely no weight and the brilliant 652cc single engine. I'm sure if these were made now, they would sell as completely on trend café racer single beastie!

On the bench at present, we have our oldest job ready to complete after waiting for a beautiful restoration on the original mag for a 1953 Model 7.

The owner requested the original mag fitted was restored and not replaced with an exchange and it looks all the better for it.



One heartache we have had recently is a nice looking 850 Commando which was supposed to have had an engine rebuild approx. 2000 miles ago but was having issues. On closer inspection the gearbox internals were severely deteriorated, and the cylinder head and barrels completely worn. Now having some nice new +20 pistons and rebore and our oversize valve guides and new valves as well as all new gearbox just about.

It amazes us sometimes what we find after so-called rebuilds have

had worn secondhand parts or non-genuine poorly made parts fitted when new genuine parts are in stock!

Scarily the sleeve gear bearing had been fitted so badly it had cracked the gearbox case and was separated from the main case luckily staying in place for the owner. The head also showed some poor running and valve seat issues as you can see from the pictures below.



On a different note, a local rider called in to see our workshop and to see if we would repair his 1996 Suzuki 350cc Goose, which of course we loved to do and help with as a classic in its own right. After valve checks, carb rebuild, fork oil change and brake service he left a very happy chap.



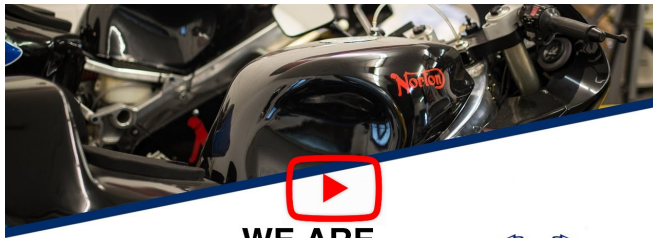
Mind you not as quickly as me on the Mini F1R 😊

Happy and safe riding Paul and the Workshop Team.

**Plenty more to come in the
next edition of "The Source" so
until then!**

The Team at Andover Norton





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