

## A Plea for Sanity

I'm a regular visitor to a particular web page for British motorcycle enthusiasts. Having been a British bike mechanic, it was exciting to find this page and have the opportunity to share and expand my knowledge. However, I'm repeatedly struck (usually between the eyes) by the prevailing opinions of those on the web. So I thought to use this space to make a case for a more sane view of these fine motorcycles. This article is the first in what I hope becomes a series.

My first concern is for the guy who writes in and says he just bought a stock 196x BSA/ Norton/ Triumph and asks what he should do to improve it just a little. The replies fly in by the hundreds: bolt-on a 750 kit, install a roller crank, 12:1 pistons, Jap carbs, racing tires, replace the electrical system, and all the rest. That's about the point I loose it! I say leave the machine as stock as possible. Yes there are some items you almost have to have, like the Boyer electronic ignition, maybe a small oil filter, and modern tires. But almost everything else should be left stock. Why? Several reasons:

1) Old technology. Let's face it; these engines will only go so fast. After you spend the \$3000 on the shopping list suggested by others, you'll get blown off the road by a \$2000 Triumph 600. So why not just save the cash and buy another separate machine for going fast? It's actually cheaper to save the classic for other pursuits.

2) Something for nothing. The higher the state of tuning, the less reliable any bike becomes. And since these bikes are 30 years old, parts are at a premium. In other words, once turned into a "money pit" any bike will continue to be a "money pit".

3) That's the brakes. Suppose you do manage to finally bolt-on all those go-fast items. How are you ever going to stop? These bikes didn't stop when they were restricted to 90 mph, what in the world are you going to do at 130? At this point I usually request the new owner's home address and phone number because I intend to be first in a long line of "friends" to "console" his widow after his upcoming accident!

4) Haul ass. The stock 60's British bike is what's known as a "babe magnet". This effect dissipates in direct proportion to the number of non-stock items used to "enhance" the machine. The sex appeal lies in its unique stock-ness. Any idiot can destroy a stock machine, that's why there's so few left. I say it takes a higher intelligence to recognize the beauty of the machine as it was delivered in 196x. (Ergo, stock machines therefore attract a higher caliber babe!)

5) Classics. You cannot own history; it is merely entrusted to you and parked in your garage for the present. If your children are to ever enjoy and come to know first-hand why British bikes are great, then you must refrain from irreversible changes to it. You and I will die someday, but these machines can be passed on to countless future generations... so why not consider leaving something besides a passing fad?

6) Follow the money. Point #5 too lofty? Then compare the resale values of stock British bikes versus radically altered machines. The stock machines' values are twice as high AND

CLIMBING! The altered machines prices are going the other way. A little trip to eBay.com will prove this point conclusively within minutes.

So have I never in my life enjoyed a chopper or cafe bike? Yes, many times. But I've also spent a significant portion of my life trying to find the stocks parts thrown away while building those machines! The mindset that makes the most sense is to have fun, but keep all your stock parts and never alter anything (especially external) that you can't take back to stock in one evening.

So am I "all show and no go?" Not in the least. My motto is "ride 'em, don't hide 'em". I believe the machine should 1) be ridden and enjoyed often, and 2) run its best while doing so. I therefore endorse electronic ignitions, port polishing, and good tires, but stop at mods that shorten the life of the engine or rider.

These are just some points to ponder, as you enjoy your British bike!

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