



# VIRUSCAST 4 –Fourth issue

## **Being the Northumbria Nortons Bananavirus Newsletter,**

**Wow!! They did write! An appeal by e-mail produced a heart-warming flood of writing that would put Shakespeare to shame (anyhow, what did he know about Nortons?)**

**In fact – if you sent a contribution, and you do not see it here, please do not be offended. Its just that I cannot fit everything in. You will appear in glory at a later edition!! Even so, the Viruscast has grown!!**

**And now even more from Clive!!**

**Do you have a bit on the side?**

Some years ago it was a common sight to see a sidecar attached to a motorcycle. After all, the working man had a tough time affording a car particularly before the advent of less pricey four wheelers like the Austin A30, Morris Minor 1000 and mini. So if you couldn't afford four wheels, three would do almost as well.

In their heyday of the forties and fifties bikes with sidecars were pressed into service hauling Mom, Dad and a couple of youngsters plus a load of luggage off on their annual hols at the seaside with little problem.

Remember, bikes were different then with easy back yard maintenance and a lusty engine providing lots of torque rather than outright power. The reverse, in fact of today's bikes. What's more bikes up to the 1960's came with their frames conveniently arranged with fittings to take a sidecar should you choose to mount one. And it wasn't just large capacity bikes that were used either. Most of the major sidecar manufacturers (of which there were many) featured lightweight ones in their catalogue including those for use with Vespa and Lambretta scooters. What the hill climbing performance was like I dread to think!

So, what about this black art of sidecaring then. The first thing to realize is that the geometry of this strange, asymmetric three wheeler is quite critical if you want to have any chance of negotiating any sort of corner at all. Sidecars could be supplied with a host of different frame fittings to cope with different bikes. Swan necks, plugs, straights and ball joints were all used to glue bike to sidecar.

Now the clever bit. For best results you need at the very least three if not four connections to achieve a solid assembly. Otherwise the whole thing bends and flexes and eventually something breaks. Don't forget with a whole compliment of passengers and holiday luggage, half a ton dead weight is quite easy to achieve.

Next take the sidecar body off the chassis so you can see what's going on.

The bike has to lean away from the sidecar by one inch measured at the handlebar so you need a plumbob and a spirit level and a method of holding the bike in place. Ropes tied to the garage door is good ! Now you need to arrange the sidecar chassis so that the sidecar wheel is anywhere between three inches and a foot in front of the bikes back wheel. But be prepared to move it backwards and forwards after a test ride if it won't go round corners.

Get hold of a big ball of string. Put a piece along the outside of the bike wheels and adjust the steering so the string is straight. Put another piece along the sidecar wheel and jiggle the chassis about until there is a 3/4" toe in, just like a car. Miss this bit out and the thing will never go straight.

When all this is done sort out the connections and bolt it up. Not so easy because the fittings are designed to go on square and you want some of them to bend a bit to get the tracking right ! Leave the body off and motor smartly up the road for a test ride. Park your wife or child on the sidecar mudguard to hold it down. A degree of faith is required here as the point of no return is approaching!

If it wont go straight either the toe in is wrong or the bike lean out is wrong or both. Back to the garage for adjustments then.

When you come to the first left hand corner, give it some beans and the bike should pivot around the sidecar wheel. If not you will go straight on quickly realizing that the sidecar wheel lead is wrong. If you have the sophistication of a separate brake for the sidecar wheel, give it a prod to start the reaction.

Now head confidently to your first right hand corner. Shut the throttle and the sidecar will begin to overtake the bike. A dab of back brake will assist. If it still goes straight on you've got the sidecar wheel lead wrong the other way. Hay ho, back to the house to re-adjust everything.

Get it all right and you can steer with either the brake or throttle. But never, ever hit the sidecar wheel brake when turning right.

When all is well, re-fit the sidecar body and offer friends or spouse a spin. Don't be put off by their reticence. Insist that they join you and appreciate your new found skill. After all, you can provide toilet paper discretely tucked underneath the seat.

Here's a tip. If you choose a sporty lightweight sidecar for extra zip and you are sad enough to have no chums on board, shove a hundredweight of spuds or a load of bricks inside otherwise every time you show off going round a left hand bend the sidecar wheel lifts alarmingly causing sphincter palpitations.

So enjoy a bit on the side and live in peace with your sidecar.

P.S. With this winter's weather in mind, I can tell you that the best vehicle to use in snow is a bike and sidecar. You can't fall off, you see and the traction is surprisingly good.

*(In my youth, about to leave Dorset for Newcastle Uni, mother in her wisdom, had read that combinations had an excellent safety record. So somehow generous mother replaced my (then) 150cc "pop-pop" James with an ancient 350 Ariel, with small battered side car. The day after it arrived, and having never driven a combination, I loaded camping gear and my friend Sam in the side car and set off for Skye. The resultant journey was definitely NOT safer than the "pop-pop" James. (One of the many ways I have attempted to get Sam killed.) But we made the trip, and I ended up in Newcastle. There followed a BSA "Flash" with single seater side car. You could put a young lady in the side car. Once I had one in the side car and a spare on the back. The side car came off in the summer - never a young lady on the back solo. But I can endorse what Clive says about the excellence of combinations in snow, in those days of real winters. - - - - Sorry, I babble too much).*

**And this, from Mick Prentice. He said I was free to “Hack it around” – I did not. Mick spins a good yarn, and though I normally go for brevity, what the hell – most of us have all the time in the world (unless you are like our son – 2 parents working from home with 2 screaming toddlers running around) . Norton only gets a small mention , but this still is about old –ish motorcycles**

With the garage full of all the British bikes I'd wanted to own in the 70s but couldn't afford at the time, a conversation at the pub turned to the increasing popularity (and price) of Jap bikes from the same period.

Not wanting another four stroke or a four cylinder machine, the choice was reduced to a two stoke triple and then I remembered a trip to a Crewe bike shop back in my student days around 1978. My mate Trev was just about to make a purchase of a Kawasaki Z650 and I was wondering around the shop looking at the second hand bikes on offer.....

There it was, big, blue and ugly as hell.... with what looked like the internals of a shiny washing machine forced into the frame where the engine should be and a toilet roll by the handle bars where the clocks should be....wait, they've put a bog roll on the back in place of a rear light, so who the hell would buy something like that?

Well, if I'm going to have a Jap bike, may as well have something weird, may as well have a RE5.

Having never seen one in a shop or on the road since that day it was time to do some searching, where did they all go? Who owns one? What are they like to own? And how much do they cost?

Joining the Suzuki Re5 and ROC internet forums quickly answered most of the questions and wetted my appetite, now I had to have one, but which one? The collective wisdom seemed to be read all of the literature, in particular the workshop manual in depth and be patient until a good one, with history and provenance comes along.....all well and good when there is money burning a hole in your pocket...

So I read and waited and finally an interesting Norton Rotary pops up on Ebay... a couple of emails and phone calls and its mine. Cheque in the post, jump on a train to Dundee pick it up and ride it back to Newcastle.....loved it....but that's another story...

No sooner do I get the Norton back to Newcastle then up pops 'The World's best RE5' on the owners forum ...99% original, great history and backed up by Wayne Waddington one of the forums moderators and certainly a guy whose opinion I can trust...what do I do?

Well after a Friday night bottle of wine, send Wayne an e-mail, find out if the bike is still for sale, is it as good as he says it is and.....would he help me get it to Newcastle upon Tyne from Sydney Australia, yeah Australia.....Wayne sent me a positive answer to all my questions...couple of days later I send a sober reply, that its going to be too much hassle but thanks for answering the questions...couple of days later, I'm thinking, to hell with it, what is the chance of a bike like this coming up in the UK.

So another email to Wayne sees me offering the asking price and looking for advice to get the bike back to the UK.

First job, getting some shipping sorted out. Wayne suggests a couple of outfits, I check them out and choose Get Routed, run by Dave, a Kiwi, a biker with a can do attitude and a straight talking manner, just the sort of guy I like to deal with. His company specialises in shipping bikes from Australia to the UK for people touring Europe then shipping them back to Oz. He still has some space in a container leaving Sydney in March due into the UK early May 2016 all I need do is drop a deposit into his UK bank account. No problem, sorted only problem, this is October 2015, it's going to be eight months before I get my new toy.....time to start planning and saving...

So how much is all this going to cost? Price of the bike + shipping + insurance + import duty + VAT, what the hell have I done.....well it's not something you do every day, so may as well enjoy it. With the shipping organised, time to put some money where my mouth is. Wayne suggests I send the owner a 10% deposit now and the balance just prior to shipping. Sounds reasonable to me.

Next organisation to get in contact with is UK Forex, they specialise in moving money around the world. You set up an account with them and start tracking the Oz Dollar against the Pound. When the exchange rate is running in your favour you request setting up a deal, tell them how much you want to send to Australia, they work out the exchange, you use your internet banking and place the money (Pounds) into their UK account. After a couple of days they transfer the same amount in Oz Dollars from their Australian account into the sellers bank account.....simple, save you a fortune compared to a bank transfer.

Time to chat to HMRC about import duty and VAT.....read everything on their website and then decide to phone them, speak to some really nice helpful people, but still can't work out how much this is going to cost...I decide to put aside £2,000..

More emails to Wayne and his mate Clyde who has kindly offered to trailer the bike down to the docks at Sydney. Wayne offers to service the bike prior to shipping, these two guys are great. If you're thinking about buying a bike from abroad, you really do need people like these on your side at the other end.

Just after Christmas, I get an email from Dave at Get Routed asking for the balance of the shipping, no problem, money goes straight into his UK account; that's that bit sorted. He sends me and Wayne a list of To-Does...2 litres of fuel in the tank, disconnect the battery, spares coming with the bike need to be boxed and attached to the bike and be at the docks 8am sharp wearing Hi-Viz...by the way the bikes fit onto steel cradles and are fork lifted into the container sideways. It's up to us to make sure the bike is less than 3.5M long, otherwise it goes in length ways, takes up more space and costs me more.....Wayne can you measure the bike mate and confirm the length with Dave?

Of course the bike will fit...so shipping is paid for and the date of shipping is set, time to pay the balance. Start looking at the value of the pound against the Oz Dollar again, book the deal and make the transfer, the bike's owner confirms the money is in her account; all is well in the world.

Time to get in contact with the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club to get a dating certificate sorted out while the bike is in transit as these things can take a while to sort.

Wayne emails me to say he has serviced the bike, all oils and coolants changed, brake fluids changed, timing checked, bike cleaned and polished ready for Clyde to take her to the docks, what a pair of stars these guys are, could only happen in the classic bike world.

On the day of departure, Clyde emails me to say the bike has been delivered and is in the container, only problem, after three months of drought, the heavens open and the bike gets soaked and dirty on the way, looks like all of Wayne's polishing has been in vain.... Only eight weeks to wait for the bike to arrive in the UK.



*Clyde with the bike on the way to the docks in Sydney  
(are those real Australian gum trees – J)*

By the way, it's now time to tell Sue that I've bought another bike.....best get that out the way, anyway that's tempered by saying we can have a couple of days in Felixstowe when we go to pick it up...we know how to treat women up North.

More conversations with HMRC draws a blank on the tax amounts, well it will just have to go onto the credit card.

Time to book a van to make the drive to Felixstowe and book hotels, conversations at the pub end up with me round at Davy's house getting instructions on how to tie down a bike in a van and borrowing his ramps and ties.

Confirmation from Dave at Get Routed that the ship will arrive on time and that we need to be at the docks at 9:00 am sharp...A surprise email from Jo at Imorex, the shipping agent used by Get Routed asks me to get in contact with them. I phone Jo and at last, someone who can give me some answers. Jo will handle all of the importation if I can give her some information.

Bill of sale, confirmation that the bike is over thirty years old, what will the bike be used for and a couple of other questions. She sends me some forms to fill out and sign, a couple of days later I get an email confirming that there will only be VAT to pay, no import duty and an Admin fee. Am I happy to pay the £500 invoice, I'm straight on the phone with the credit card details, remember I'd set aside £2,000 for this...result.

Now no disrespect to anybody who lives in Felixstowe, but...we book into the Premier Inn, have a walk round the town, have one expensive visit to a seaside pub and head back to the hotel. If anyone remembers Morrissey's solo hit 'every day is like Sunday' they will be able to identify with Felixstowe... Back at the hotel, a good meal and get talking to a bunch of Aussie Bikers who are staying there waiting to pick up their bikes for a six month tour of the UK including the TT, Europe and down to Morocco, now that's a holiday...



*RE5 at the docks in Felixstowe*

Next day sees us at the Imorex office, Hi Vized up to meet Jo, I introduce myself and off we go to the warehouse to find a group of modern day touring/adventure bikes being picked up by their Aussie owners and at the back, this very dated and forlorn looking RE5. Battery and tyres had gone flat and this is one heavy bike to push into the van... step forward half a dozen burly dockers and the bike is in, tied down and on the road back to Newcastle.

A steady drive up the A1 worrying about any expensive crashing sounds in the back of the van and plenty of time to think about..... how to get this heavy bike out the van, how to register the bike in the UK, getting it on the road and would I actually enjoy riding it now I own it.....

*(Bringing it to the club night, Mick - - - - ? )*

**Don sent these pictures – clearly not totally bored:**



*(Hope you do not strangle yourself in all that wiring, Don. And, when you finally take it out for a ride, may I join you??)*

### **Things that went wrong on the road - or maybe a confession - continued**

**(Simon had said I should write about things that went wrong on the road. It's called "on the road maintenance. Here's more of it -----)**

Well, we coped with the next rally in the Netherlands, and onwards into Germany, visiting various friends.

But I forgot to mention that on the previous Ireland trip, due to the amazingly bumpy roads and the suspension getting bashed down onto the end stop – constantly – the back wheel managed to wear through the wiring to the rear light and brake light. Fixed with connector block I carry, and some bodging.

Coming back from Hartlepool, that autumn, at dusk in rain, the chain decided to detach itself and drape itself down the road like a dead adder. The connecting link had broken. Happily fixed with a spare, though re-threading the chain was a bit of a challenge, without getting run over. Discussion with the nice lady at Sprockets Unlimited revealed the following opinion: Because the side plate in the

connecting link has to slide on, there has to be a clearance, be it ever so tiny. Which means that in use, there is a flexing of the other side plate, be it also ever so tiny. The whole thing is hardened so that eventually fatigue can set in – and “snap”. The recommendation is regularly to change the connecting link. I do this on the rear chain annually, and also every time I find myself exploring the bowels of the primary drive. I also carry spare links and spare connector links.

Autumn 2005 saw a big ride to S.W France and then back in a half circle, Eastwards, and North via Caen (D Day landing beaches). I think there was one failure but so slight I cannot remember it.

And 2006 – the Transcanada ride – covered elsewhere. The bike went out in the belly of a passenger plane, from Glasgow to Vancouver. It ran like a top up to Glasgow, but the ride from Vancouver airport to the friend where we were staying was an ordeal of banging, overheating and backfiring, very difficult when stopping at all the traffic lights. Local motorcyclists blamed crap Canadian fuel, and suggested a magic jollop that got us going, but I was never happy with the running that trip. There was a final failure near Ottawa. Rescued by the Ottawa Norton Owners, who pronounced the capacitor duff, and also the spare I carried and which I had tried. I have since wondered if the conditions inside an airplane may do something bad to capacitors. This info is not much use to you lot unless you plan to fly your bike somewhere. The other failure (well erratic running) turned out to be 2 bugs sucked into the pilot jet airway that runs just under the slide in a Monoblok. I had considered fitting an air filter before the trip but decided against it because I feared it could change the carburation, and I was not interested in experimentation. Oh, and, of course, at least one ammeter flapped itself to death. On ammeters, I have found that even on 6 volts, a 0-12 amp ammeter flaps round less than the recommended 0-8 amp version. Also the ones that say “Lucas” flap round more than the tacky and tinny looking pattern jobs (made in England) that Les Emery sells. So I fit that latter (0-12) and carry a spare.

On return there was found to be frame damage (cracks on the inside side of the suspension hangers), and one piston had tried to melt (top like a soup bowl). Probably due to bad firing with crappy capacitors, combined with weeks of 35 degree temperatures. (40C the day we left Halifax – can you believe it?).. And frame repair of course. Another subject.

That’s enough troubles for now. More troubles next time.

**Well, I don’t know about you, but right now, the way I feel, when they finally let us out, I’m going to jump on that Norton, open the throttle, and not stop until I reach Cape Town – or Vladivostok!!**

**And - Hoping you all stay well and also have no financial troubles. We retired idlers have it easier in this situation than people needing to work to buy food – at least we are OK as long as the pension funds hold up.**

**Yours with cabin fever ---**

*Scribe*

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