



VIRUSCAST 6 Sixth issue

Being the Northumbria Nortons Bananavirus Newsletter,

Well, Boris did say (if anyone really understands what Boris said) that we can go into the country for a walk. So rides are OK as long as you go for a walk too (???). Is this part of being a “Lert”?

Anyhow if we get enough liberty so that we can be “lerts” all the time, then we can have club events, and I think that will be time for these Viruscasts to stop. However Simon’s penultimate Zoom club night demanded at least one more Viruscast --- sorry – you don’t get let off yet - you are going to suffer horribly.

In fact I was without articles, until Bob came up with another. But if nobody sends any more, Viruscasts will definitely end anyhow

Meanwhile, at Simon’s “Zoom” club night, the subject of permitted rides came up. If 6 can congregate in a garden (while drinking their own beer/soup/whisky, and eating their own steak and ale pie/sandwiches. Curry), then presumably 6 bikes can go for a ride as long as they stay more than 2 metres apart (definitely applies to anyone following me!). Simon was going to come up with some ideas. Meanwhile the weather has gone to hell, but it won’t last for ever, and anyhow agriculture needs the water, so they can grow food for us to eat. So - - - look out for a notice of a “Lerts ride out”.. (maybe with our own personal flasks of coffee and our own personal bits of cake). Which would mean we are riding again – maybe an appropriate time for a final Viruscast.

And here are the immortal words of our august chairman:

My Mk3 850 Commando – a potted history.

Most of you probably know that I’ve had my Commando a long time... but how long?

My first bike, at 16 (in 1967) was a Honda C100 but that didn’t last long. Somehow it managed to shear the teeth on the camshaft drive gear wheel. My Dad and I didn’t know much about mechanical things in those days so it was decided to buy a new Honda C50 for about £90 or so. I thrashed it mercilessly. Eventually after the 6 month guarantee had expired, it started jumping out of top (not very good when you’ve only got 3 gears). Having decided that the local dealer was a rip off merchant, I got a workshop manual and stripped the engine down in a tiny shed, concluded the dogs on second gear were rounded and ordered a new second gear from a different dealer (in Liverpool). The gear went in ok but I couldn’t get neutral. It turned out this

gear was a bit wider than the one I'd taken out so back to Liverpool and a week's wait for the right gear to turn up. I rode the C50 round for a bit longer but the problem returned. This time I solved it by putting in a Suzuki back wheel with a much smaller sprocket and forgetting about top gear!

Then I went to sea for 6 months. When I returned, with money, the C50 was traded in for a 1955 ES2, which seemed massive! I paid £30 for it. I took the ES2 to South Shields when I went to college there. I had some minor problems but nothing serious. I rode it up and down to Northwich a few times. After a couple of years I decided I wanted something more modern. I bought a 1969 BSA B44 Shooting Star. Notably this was virtually oil tight, quite nice handling and a lot of torque. However it did vibrate a lot and went through headlamp bulbs at an alarming rate. It also threw the big end on a trip to South Shields somewhere north of Scotch corner!

In the summer of 1973 after a six month voyage as 3rd Mate I traded the BSA in for a new 750 Commando fastback with disc front brake and a Combat motor. Later that summer a mate and I rode the Commando to St Tropez for the weekend. We got there in 27 hours (no speed limits on the Autoroutes then) but it took 3 days to get back! The bike went really well but oil poured out of the engine so it was hard to keep my feet on the footrests! The dealer (Horsmans in Liverpool) didn't want to know - "they all leak oil" was his excuse. However after changing the head gasket and base gasket a few times, and having learned that some barrels were porous, I got a second hand barrel and the oil leak was cured. I kept that Commando for 3 years and did a fair amount of touring on the continent on my own. I even went to the Elephant Rally in February 1974. That was really cold! I needed molegrips to get my tent pegs out of the frozen ground. I also joined the NOC in 1974. I did about 41,000 miles on that Commando, and despite what every one predicted, I never suffered main bearing failure.

In 1976 I went to college in Bristol to study for my 1st Mate's ticket. While there I visited H&L Motors in Stroud. They had traditionally been Triumph dealers but were then also selling Nortons.

At H&L I saw a silver Mk3 Interstate, I was attracted to it by the fact I'd seen a couple of them at rallies and they seemed to be genuinely oiltight and also for my purposes, the 5 gallon tank was definitely a plus for long distance touring. I asked about a trade in and the deal was done in no time. I was astonished to find that the Mk3 only did about 36 mpg, whilst my Fastback did about 49-50 mpg. Consequently my range was virtually unchanged!!! It took me a while to get to the root of the problem. Quite simply the main jets were too big! Changing from 230s to 210s got it up to 43 mpg. Eventually a Boyer ignition a fairing and peashooter silencers got it to about 50mpg. Later this was improved further when the original Concentrics wore out and were placed by a single SU. The SU was something else. I liked the really light twistgrip action. It was a vast improvement on twin Concentrics. With the SU I could easily get 65mpg. On a long run even 75 mpg was possible without any real effort. The downside was that the dashpot needed topping up from time to time and this was an awkward job.

I've had my Mk3 for 44 years. It's been continuously taxed and tested (when required) and never off the road for any significant periods. I used it regularly to commute to work, from Morpeth to Newcastle, between 1987 and 2014 and also used it for quite a few trips around this country and abroad so you won't be surprised to hear that I reckon it's done about 285,000 miles.

I've found it to be quite reliable. Although I didn't keep a log, from memory these are the problems I remember.

50,000 miles – The electric start failed (sprag clutch). I tried fitting a couple of replacement sprags but they only lasted a couple of starts. At £30 each I decided to give up and use the kickstart.

60,000 miles - the timing side camshaft bush broke up. I think this was caused by me over tightening the cam chain.

63,000 miles - the gearbox layshaft bearing failed. Luckily it happened at about 3mph in heavy traffic in Woolwich during a train strike. After disconnecting the chain I was able to push the bike home.

102,000 miles – I removed the head and discovered the bore was worn and that the top ring on one piston had broken. I had the barrel rebored to +20 by Northern Rebores Services at the top of Westgate hill. I brought the barrel home and started to clean up the barrel to repaint it. To my horror the cylinder wall was so thin at the front of the right cylinder that I went through it! Probably mostly due to corrosion from the

outside due to all-weather riding for years, so It was back to the rebore people for a sleeve to be fitted. Around this time I discovered the left inlet valve guide was loose and had this repaired

170,000 miles – The bike wasn't running well. I checked a number of things and went for a test run. On the A1 near Morpeth I suddenly had loads of smoke out of the right exhaust. Back home I stripped the bike down to find melting damage to the side of the right piston at the front of the cylinder. Following consultation with Richard, we determined that corrosion between the liner and the cylinder had pushed the liner inwards that particular diameter, it was about 3 thou undersized, whilst elsewhere we had about 10 thou normal wear. On Richard's recommendation I sourced a second hand barrel from Hull which was allegedly +20. However the bores were not parallel. Richard bored them out to +60 to get them parallel. This proved to be worthwhile. 80,000 miles later we checked the bores and the wear was minimal...a couple of thou. At about the same time Richard replaced the valve guides (including manufacturing a sleeve to correct the poor geometry of the earlier valve guide repair) and fitted new inlet valve seats.

240,000 miles – having injured my knee walking to the pub in Wooler, (*how?? – you usually do that when walking BACK from the pub! – editor*) and found it difficult to start the bike with my left foot I resolved to sort out the electric start. At this point I was aware of some problems caused by Boyer electronic ignition so I started by getting a Pazon Altair ignition, which was easy to fit, easy to set up and is a very nice bit of kit. I think I'm just about outside the 7.5 year guarantee period and I've had no problems (touch wood). I then replaced the engine sprocket and the starter gear wheel and bought a new sprag clutch (which now had 18 sprags rather than the original 14). Finally I got a new improved starter motor and thicker cables from Holland Norton and a Wesco battery (12V16-A2) from Paul Goff. This worked perfectly until at last years Morpeth rally, the sprag started slipping.

250,000 miles – I retired at about this time (2014). After attending the International Rally in Bremen, I spent the autumn rebuilding the bike. I had the frame grit blasted and some minor welding repairs carried out. I stripped the engine and gearbox down and replaced all bearings and the gearbox bushes, had the tank and side panels professionally painted and the frame and swing arm stove enamelled, overhauled the isolastics, renewed the swing arm spindle and bushes. It was virtually like a new bike by the time I finished.

At the start of the lockdown this year, I looked into the electric start problem. Apparently the crux of the problem is the hardness inside the engine sprocket. Andover Norton say this was improved about 2013. we shall see. I replaced the sprocket and the sprag clutch this time but not the gear wheel which seemed unmarked.

There are a few other things I could write about such as brake callipers, carburettors and wheel rims, but I don't want this article to get too long. Some might say it is already.

Bob

While avoiding catching a virus, we caught a new member!!

He's called Kym Bradshaw, and he rides a Commando. He moved all the way from Brisbane, in Oz, just so he could join the Northumbria Norton Owners. And he seems to have quite a tale to tell - - - (prompt for Kym).

And a message for Kym - I normally do a mid-season newsletter and an end of year newsletter, plus stuff around the A G M in late winter. The idea behind these viruscasts was,

a: To keep members entertained so they did not up and shoot themselves during "lock-down", and,

b: to stop me from getting too bored (and maybe shooting myself during lockdown).

This last viruscast is a bit thin on material, in spite of Bob's efforts. You joined too late to be subjected to the previous ones. If you feel deprived and want to see previous Viruscasts, or indeed previous newsletters going a long way back, (hear my own trumpet tootling) , look at www.nortonownersclub.org. Then click on "branches". You will then see a map. You can either click on the spot where we are situated, or, if you

look further down the page, you will find a list of branches and you can click on us there. Once into “Northumbria”, click on “Newsletters”.

Sadly, or maybe not sadly, the web site is really not used much now. There is so much “linkedin”, “whatsapp”, “Facebook”, emails, texts, zooms, it is hard to see where any one of them actually fits in our communications. But I keep putting newsletters into the web site so as to keep a history.

Anyhow, welcome. Maybe we will see you on a “Lerts’ ride” - - - - ?? J.

Things that went wrong on the road - or maybe a confessional – continued even longer

(Simon said I should write about things that went wrong on the road. It’s called “on the road maintenance”. And it’s a long list - – here are even more disasters ---)

Well, we reached the end of the 2010 Spanish rally (Northern Spain). . There was no big ride in 2011 and in 2012 the international rally was held in the UK.

The main gremlin attacks on the road over this period were –

A new clutch spider from Norvil. The original has splines right through inside it which have a small step half way up the spline, so the end of the shaft comes up against these steps, and you tighten the clutch down on to the steps. But the “spider” is all one piece. A new one, from Norvil, was made with a shrink-fit boss in the middle instead of the step arrangement. I had been concerned that the steps had worn back, putting the primary chain out of alignment. I fit the Norvil one. The original had been an interference fit on the shaft but the new one you could rock slightly – not an interference fit, so that the load comes onto the shrink-fit boss in the middle after you have tightened it. With the result that the shrink-fit boss “De-shrink-fitted” with the tugging back and forth from the chain, and went walkies. So when you pulled on the clutch lever, the clutch did not disengage, it just went sideways. I got home (Somehow. At least I was local) – I contacted Norvil – the usual – “it has never happened before”. But they sent a replacement. Which I did not fit – I refit the old one. (Later the steps got so worn that the “spider” started grinding against the gearbox sprocket. Richard did wondrous things and all is now OK).

There had also been a side-stand issue – after Canada I decided I needed one – bought from Norvil. It snapped off. The brackety thing on which the stand pivots looked like the original, but was a grainy casting, which snapped. Sent back to Norvil (“it has never happened before”) for credit. Later I found Norvil selling the fork leg cheap on e-bay, so I bought it back cheap and very kind Mackem John made me a new brackety thing from solid. These Dommi side-stands are far from ideal from the word go – but it does the job now as long as you are careful.

Some of you may remember the photo of Alan lying on the ground outside Bob’s house, alternately sniffing the puddle of oil that had formed under my bike and then sniffing the oil in the tank - when he pronounced “they smell different”. This side stand had got pushed the wrong way (inwards at the bottom), and had come up against the lip of the primary chain cover, and had pushed it aside – thus dumping the contents.

Then came 2013 and a very red face. The Clive memorial run met at the 3 Tuns at Heddon-on-the Wall, where muggins tanked up. After which the bike did not want to work – and was disassembled by all and sundry with much rejoicing. The cause was simple. I had put in diesel! Rescued by Don and Brenda – anyhow Brenda in a car with a big empty can. Tank contents into can. Put in petrol and head for home (the “run” had left without me, the buggers). Engine totally stopped one mile down. And, ignominiously, Carole Nash home.

After this, the engine would not run right. Changed fuel again, checked plugs for any carbon residue and checked they sparked, cleaned out carburettor and anything else you can think of. All failed. Finally put in a different set of plugs. Problem solved. Though the plugs had looked OK, and sparked, the diesel had done SOMETHING to them, so next time you fill your tank with diesel, remember this ---

Returning from the French rally via Bruges, the ignition went erratic. I still run on a distributor. (I like things I can see working and can fix with a screwdriver – or enormous hammer). The cam had gone wobby on the base plate to which it is press-fit. A temporary fettle was soon replaced with a lovely “as-new” cam from George. This is superb – its hard to measure timing to a degree or less, but I would say the cylinders are only 1 to 1½ degrees different, which is actually remarkable with this primitive kit.

2014 – International rally, Bremen – no problems. Just rain and fierce winds on the autobahn.

2015. Down to Andalusia.: Granada (definitely a “wow”) , Seville, Cadiz. Only fault is that a fork shroud came unattached on the way home – dropped down the fork leg and clattered horribly. Temporarily heaved back into position with cable ties – and sorted when home. The screws are up inside. Moral: Lock-tite recommended. Also the forks had started to “bottom” on bumps. New springs were previously fit in 1998, and after I replaced them, the suspension was ok.

And that’s enough trouble for now.

Scribe



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