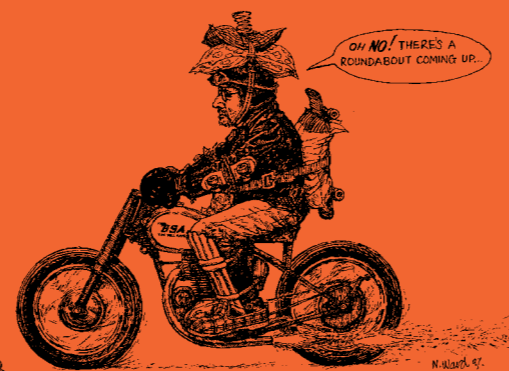


# DOWN THE ROAD BEAT THE CLOCK!

with Steve Wilson



Steve joins some Essex Boys hoping to dismantle, renovate, rebuild and run, a military Matchless ... in just twelve hours. Will they do it? Part One; The Rush To Lunch!

Photos by Alan Jennings, Roy Bellett, Steve Wilson

It was definitely a RealClassic sort of thing. Last winter, Roy Bellett of the AJS & Matchless Owners Club, G15 CS-fancier and moving spirit of the East London and Essex Section, had a notion. Something to give the chaps a project that brought them all together. No particular reason, just a pastime really. 'And,' deadpanned Roy, 'I get a free rebuild.'

This was the plan. Take one distinctly pre-owned ex-Luxembourg Army, 1951 Matchless G3LS 350 jampot single. (Yes, I know you've probably never seen a military G3 with rear suspension, but that's because the poor old Brits had had to soldier on with their rigid wartime ones until they would go no more. But in the

Fifties and Sixties, the latest kit had been sold in military guise to foreign Forces. A case of Export And Kill, you could say.)

Then descend on the bike early one morning: take it to pieces, repaint, rebuild and refurbish it; then put it back together again, and get it running. All in twelve hours.

Roy was kind enough to ask me along. He didn't have to ask twice.

### The Essex Way

On Grand National Day, after a roadside breakfast of Red Bull and cereal bar, at half past seven I drove into the paddock of Roy's rambling home outside Brentford. I was greeted by the Section's ultra-friendly Chairman Dennis

Fox, and taken over to a recently completed new workshop, behind the main one where Roy keeps his bikes. Tea and coffee were already on the go.

Roy Bellett himself was there, hammering in a last couple of nails to the long wooden workbench. You could say Roy is a lucky man, though I think it's probably a case of 'Funny, the harder I worked, the luckier I got'. Running a large-scale fitted kitchen business, he enjoys the surprisingly rural property where chickens strut the lawns ('a badger had four of them the other night'), and is blessed with a warm and lively wife in the shape of Porsche-driving Karen, and two cracking teenage kids, Josh and Lucinda, who would cast an appropriately



Draining the oil



Roy Bellett giving the primary chaincase cover the cleansing treatment

sarky eye on proceedings that day, but who helped anyway. Tall and powerfully built, Roy is a forceful personality, but he always keeps it light. If anyone could get this done, he could. It wouldn't be for want of trying: in the early morning chill, he'd already worked up a sweat.

Roy had bought the Matchless from Luxembourg for around £1200, after a three-month haggle, and fellow clubman Pat Gill had repatriated it while on a trip over there. Now Roy outlined the build. 'We're going to strip it to the frame. Paint everything.' (Using a military model was canny there, on the principle of 'If it moves, salute it/If it don't move, paint it green'.)

'We'll remove the engine and strip it to the crankcases for a full top end overhaul – we've got a new barrel and piston from Tony Surbey at AMC Classic Spares (01462 811770), as well as around £200-300 worth of bulk supplies from Jampot Spares (01536 511532). We'll fit a new harness, new clutch plates and springs, new primary and rear chains, a new exhaust system (which has to be painted black), and new brake shoes front and rear. The forks will be overhauled, and the rear units. The engine and wheels will be rebuilt in the main garage.'

The painting was to be done in a couple of booths behind another of the wooden buildings dotted about the property; Karen Bellett's sauna. And that was where the painted items were to be dried and cured. 'If Karen sees that, she'll go absolutely mad!'

As the 8am start approached, a hard core of around half a dozen guys assembled in the shed, supplemented by other bods who came and went during the day. These were Essex boys, but

old Essex boys, most in their 50s and 60s. One particularly quietly hard-working chap, Pete Bearman, had turned out despite suffering from a chest infection – as had the painter, Pete Berry. These men knew each other well, and most had rebuilt their own bikes, several to a prize-winning standard. The level of chat and good humour in that shed as the day wore on had to be experienced to be believed.

Then there were the Section's specialists. Dave Slater, who would take the front forks away to his nearby home and rebuild them. Ron West, who would look after the electrics. Dudley 'the Chemist' Woods, who was to overhaul the

speedo, and chemically black nuts, bolts and washers with a period finish. And Derek York, a professional wheelbuilder (Essex Wheels: 01787 460230), there with his nephew Jamie Rogers who also plies that trade (0788 753118).

### The Off

The Army bike sat on the bench, with scabby paintwork, but remarkably complete. Dismantling began at 8 sharp. White protective gloves were the order of the day. Several men had brought their own toolkits, and Pete Bearman had put yellow and green-striped tape around his spanners to identify them. But the



Stubborn Matchless about to get 'educated' by hammer



It comes apart like this, then!





And when a skyhook would come in handy...



Main frame loop, engine and gearbox complete, and the swinging arm hanging from the rafters

guy next to him had done so too – they were both electricians by trade. ‘I thought, nobody will do that...’

Soon it turned out that a few nuts and bolts were missing from the project. No problem, as Roy had plenty of spares, and except for special fasteners, most were to be replaced anyway. ‘Anybody who’s missing any bits for their project,’ joked Roy, ‘here they are. Next week we’re doing a G50!’ Then he sprinted off to fetch metric spanners for someone.

Soon enough force was required, and a small hammer was reached for. ‘That’s not a hammer,’ chorused a shed-full of Crocodile Dundee fans, as a lump mallet appeared. ‘This is a hammer!’

‘You’ll be pleased to know it has oil in the chaincase,’ said someone as he removed

the cover.

‘Oi, oil on the floor!’

‘You’ll be used to that with your bike!’

By half past eight, the tank, exhaust system, short dualseat and one jampot were off. With the tail of the hinged rear mudguard lifted, exposing cobwebs on the rear wheel, you could see the antiquated pattern of the worn rear tyre with its double, parallel, inside treads. New Dunlop Trials rear and Mitre ribbed front covers were waiting.

‘Before I cut this...’ came a voice ‘...it has got a new wiring harness, ennit?’

Blue plastic boxes were filling up with larger components. Half a dozen guys were working in what seemed to be organised chaos rather than any particular order. As tall stalwart Reg Green

stripped away the rear chain, a voice observed ‘Reg’s going back to his rocker days, taking the chain off so ‘e can smash someone wiv it...’

Someone else said later, ‘Listen, if you stop me, you stop Reg. And if you stop Reg, that’s your lot!’

Another held up a spanner and said ‘The weird thing about this is that the ring fits, but the other end don’t.’

‘Bought it on ebay...’

The shed rang with hammering. ‘Don’t ruin the paintwork, will you?’ Roy joked. Section Health and Safety officer Keith Gray had taken a mallet to the recalcitrant front wheel, observing ‘We need to educate it, do we?’ That didn’t work, and frustration rose (‘That wasn’t a nasty word, was it?’), so shortly someone went to get a gas bottle and torch from his car; meanwhile Roy produced a canister blow torch. Both went to work, where the spindle had oxidized onto the detachable bottom pieces of the fork. I, Alan Jennings the Section scribe and photographer, plus Chairman Dennis Fox who was filming the day with a video camera (very 21<sup>st</sup> century – two men working and three taking photos) all converged on this spectacle. ‘I wanna get them blowing this place up!’

Meanwhile, as a beautiful sunny morning developed outside, others were wondering where a Section member with a new bike had got to.

‘E’s out on his Harley.’

‘Gotta bandana round his ‘ead.’

‘E’s ‘ogging it!’



Meanwhile, support is provided by the unsung heroes dept. Karen prepares elevenses...



The repainting was performed al fresco: the G3’s tank is getting a brisk rub-down prior to finishing



Man from Mars? Nope; getting ready to spray...



The front brake assembly really was corroded into place

Roy said, ‘Right, we know the magneto works, but the dynamo’s suspect. Now, don’t split the engine and gearbox. We’ll have the clutch out, and then see how we’re doing time-wise, know what I mean? Mag off? Yeah – just mark the timing. Here, what happened to those jampot bolts? Where’s your nuts?’

Chorus: ‘Down by your knees!’

By 9 o’clock the wheels were off, though Ron Mathers was still struggling with mole-grips to remove a broken front mudguard stay bolt. While the bike’s rear was supported by a jack at the back, the oil pan beneath the sump got in the way of putting a block of wood under the front. Cheerful Will Powell jumped up on the bench with a thick rope, crying ‘Hang ‘em High!’ and chucking it up over an (unfastened) cross-beam, supported the frame with a sling.

Vic Sayers was energetically removing the engine. ‘Don’t smash it up, Vic! Can’t take him anywhere! Take your time, for God’s sake.’ There were smiles; I realised they were all smiling as they worked. Then came a plaintive cry: ‘I just drained the oil into me glove!’

Dudley Woods the chemist was doubling as speedo king, and with the brass-rimmed instrument off, was going to have a look inside it and recondition where necessary. ‘That’s the first time,’ he said, ‘I’ve ever had to get a speedo bulb out with mole-grips!’

It was 9.30, and just the engine and gearbox were left dangling. Taking things apart is always the easier bit, but the speed of work so far was

encouraging. Will Powell called ‘Is anybody gonna hold the bike while I untie it?’

‘Nah, we want it to fall on you.’ As Will undid the sling and the rope fell back onto the bench, another voice asked ‘Is your second name Pierrepont or something?’

Roy stood back and looked at the engine. ‘Where’s me bike gone?’

### Wheels, Paint – and a Quick Blast

At that point, female voices called the shed-dwellers out to fang down. Karen Bellett and 14 year-old Lucinda produced ace breakfast rolls, prior to a last minute shopping expedition in the Porsche, before Lucinda left for a Nile cruise the following day. She’s much more than just a pretty Essex face and a dent in the credit card, though. A straight-A student in all the sciences, in six months Lucinda is off to the Space Centre at Knoxville, Alabama. While there she’ll do a ‘Beat-the-Clock’ of her own, with six hours in a space simulator to complete a repair ‘in space’.

Meanwhile all the stripped components were being de-greased in a tank opposite the shed; then sanded down, primed and painted behind the sauna. Dave Slater had taken the forks off home; a stud needed drilling out. Roy was chopping the spokes off the wheels; ‘we need to get these hubs painted quick’ – as Alan Jennings approached.

Alan had already discovered that the wiring to the horn button went inside the handlebars, and now he needed to find the right colour for

the horn wire on the new harness, supplied by Colin Farrington (01603 737702). The relevant wiring diagram in the reproduction 1951 Parts Book was on p96 – and p96 turned out to be missing. Roy had written job descriptions on sticky paper taped round different wires – but these didn’t square up with the circuit diagram from Farrington, which they now discovered in the harness envelope... Oy oy oy.

It was pleasant to stand in the sunlight outside the main garage with a coffee, and chat with Chairman Dennis, while checking out a row of



Wheelbuilders in the open air



But it was worth it



Roy's bikes. These included his second, newly restored G15CS, as well as a '59 650 CSR. 'One of our guys, John Taylor, rebuilt it, and then he died. Roy bought it because we try to keep a bike like that in the Section.'

Brian said that a frequent Section destination was The Squadron café at North Weald airfield. 'We go for fish'n'chips nights, and start runs from there. North Weald was home to the only Battle of Britain VC winner, as well as to a famous Norwegian squadron which in the course of the war lost 130 fliers, so that's where we always go for Remembrance Day.' Dennis had an RAF connection in the shape of his older brother, an instrument technician who had flown with 617 Squadron, and even mended Guy Gibson's watch!

Dennis then introduced me to Derek York the wheelbuilder, and his nephew Jamie Rogers, first telling me 'Derek was a grass-track and road race sidecar champion in his day; he may seem meek and mild now, but on track he was a tiger.' Jamie's also a sidecar grass-track man. Derek, dressed for work in a shop coat, had already discovered that the new rims Roy had sourced were different from the ones that had come off the G3. Measuring them with a micrometer which he produced from an old spectacle case, he said philosophically 'The new rims are wider, plus the lacing is different, with different-facing piercing holes. But they're near enough, we'll just have to alter the offset a bit.' As Roy put an Elvis tape on in the garage, Derek and Jamie set to work on the khaki-sprayed rims and spokes.

I wandered off to check out the paint operation. Someone asked Pete Barry the paint man what they could do. 'Everything that's red,' he replied, gesturing at a bank of

small components already finished in red lead undercoat, 'has got to go green. Except these,' he added, picking up a pair of metal 'M' tank badges, 'which have to go black. And anything alloy's got to have two coats.'

'How about camouflaging the chickens?' someone asked.

Young Josh Bellett, applying filler to a ding in the tank, called out 'I'm blatantly up for that!' Then there was a minor crisis, as the compressor packed up. 'I have got another one,' said an anxious Roy Bellett, 'but it'll take a while to fetch.' Happily he then found that it was only the overheating switch which had inadvertently been triggered, and the compressor started up again.

Wandering past the sauna, as heat surged from the door, I had a look in at the components cooking there, which included the hubs. Karen had gone off with Lucinda in the Porsche, and all was well. So far... The sauna really worked; all the painted items dried in about an hour.

Meanwhile Ron West the electrical specialist had discovered that a) the old dynamo was knackered, and b) so was the one that Roy was proposing as a substitute; though it did have a new armature.

Back outside the garage, the wheelbuilding was going forward. Derek was miking one of the wheels again: 'It's got to come down a bit, Jamie; ease it down,' which involved slackening off the spokes with a tool made out of an old spoke. 'I used to work with Wal Philips the dealer and fuel-injector man,' said Derek, 'so we always call this tool a whizzer, as he did.'

It was now time for me to take advantage of Roy's kind offer and go for a blast on his 'new' maroon 1965 G15CS. Its engine had

been rebuilt by Section man Dave Pratt, who that day was doing the G3's motor. Dave's attentions were probably why the G15 started for me second kick (though I did have a bit more trouble later when people were watching!). The rebuild had involved laser-cut spacers for the primary chaincase to help accommodate the belt drive fitted and its new clutch. There had also been very little clearance for the Mikuni carb.

I've loved every one of the Norton/Matchless hybrid twins – N15 CS, P11 etc – that I've been lucky enough to ride, and these Matchless-framed, Atlas-engined models seemed to make the best street scramblers of the lot. This one was very different from Roy's other '65 G15CS, which was well-worn, clattery, under-braked and went like a bullet.

This one's stubby megas gave a deeper, less explosive note than the other's shorty mufflers. But it pulled from the moment the clutch bit. Heading off along the winding Essex roads, considering its 21 inch knobbly front tyre and the fat high profile 4.0 x 18 on the rear, it provided wonderfully reassuring bend-swinging. Rider exuberance made for a tendency to swing wide; but when concentrating to cross a single-lane bridge, it tracked absolutely true.

With just double digits still on the mileometer since the rebuild, I wasn't going to explore outer limits, but did as Roy had suggested, short-shifting up through the gears and staying in top. For a rigidly mounted 750, the ride was incredibly smooth. I overtook a couple of Sunday crawlers in good style, but the engine wasn't pulling hard-hard yet. The brakes, however, were better than on Roy's old one. If there was a niggle, it was the slight difficulty gearchanging in my Size 10s, due to the pedal being over-close to the right-hand footrest. But parked up again, this stripped-down, purposeful bike with its pretty, late Matchless badges on the spanking new maroon paint offset by the dark silver frame, created indecent levels of lust in your reporter. I wanted one.

### Together Again

It was around 1 o'clock when I returned, and after tea and pastries which the ladies had brought back from shopping, a slightly frantic air took hold as the rebuild began. Roy was everywhere, dynamic but joking everyone along. 'Give Dave a ring and see where he is with the front forks. Who took the swinging-arm out? Dud, get the spacers out of the bath, we need 'em. And have you got any studs done in the oven? Where's the spacer for the centre stand

spring? It was down for spraying...'

Dave Pratt on the engine was asking for a compressor for the piston rings, and someone went to fetch one from his car. Roy found the frame bolt. Tall Reg Green came back with the refurbished, newly sprayed jampot units, and after a while with these fitted, the bike began to take shape again. One difficulty was that many of the groups of smaller components, put in pots during the dismantling, had had to come out to be blacked up by Dudley Woods. Roy said 'I'm still after the stand spacers. The last I saw of them, they was down there with the stand. Are they the standard AMC ones – if so, I've got some.' Meanwhile, off to one side, Dud the Chemist with his little stove was finalising the treated bolts. 'That one's got to go straight through,' said Roy, 'or it'll take the paint off. We'll just put it in at the front – we'll take it out again, it's just to get the frame up together.' Indeed, watching, you got the real meaning of 'a bolted-up frame', as the upper front bolt went through the engine plate. 'Dud, you got any big

washers there? 3/8ths inch? You must have had two, at least.'

Roy diverted outside for a moment, to tell Geoff Gibbons who was reassembling the seat, 'There's six springs missing and I want it beefed up. Pull these rivets out and the cover'll come off: here's a new cover we made up earlier. Move the new big springs to the middle, and use the little ones around the edge.'

By 1.30 the smart new wheels arrived, with tyres fitted and inflated. Soon after, Dave Slater in his cord cap returned with the fork legs; they were grabbed instantly, to be taken off and sprayed. In the hut it was amazing how it was all coming together again. There was a constant babble of voices, against the background whir of the belt-driven wheel at the side, with Roy's voice driving it all on, the motivator.

He went out, and came back in with the repainted rear mudguard. 'There's new nuts and bolts for this guard in a box there.' The hinged mudguard then proceeded to nip him. 'Ow! I feel an injury coming on! Dud, have you

blackened all them spacers and that for the back wheel? No? Ten minutes and then we'll need them.

'Did it have a head steady?' Roy asked, and a voice replied 'No it didn't.' Dave Slater held up the fork seal holders. 'Scrap, Roy?'

'Scrap,' came the answer, 'we've got new.' 'The seals were all right,' said Dave, and this proved just as well. The new oil seal holders didn't fit, and the old ones seemed too bashed out of shape to get a measurement out of them at first. Roy said 'I prepared these two new ones earlier, stripped the chrome off them. But they were inch and a quarter – and the original ones are inch and an eighth...' If Dave wasn't able to straighten the old ones out, Roy was going to have to go to his work in Billericay 'and find the ones I've probably got there. It'll be a nightmare, take me an hour at least, but I'm the only one that can find them. Though it's still only 2 o'clock...'

After Roy had gone off, taking one of the original seal holders for a pattern, Dave set about straightening the dents out of the other with a mallet, using the tool meant for putting the oil seals in, as a drift. It worked, too, and as the holder went off to be painted, Roy was recalled, and later Dave did the other one too.

The square military tail lamp with its restricted aperture appeared in pieces for re-assembly, and I found out why Dudley had been calling for silver paper. It was to pack inside the lamp and make it reflective, with a clear space left for the two bulbs. 'That's all the pattern ones are these days,' said Dud, 'and that's what this was. Good enough for the MoT.'

By 2.15 the oil tank, battery holder and that rear light were on. Ron the electrician had the headlamp wired up, but was going to wait on the fork legs before fitting it. There was debate about spacers where the oil tank married with the left-side battery carrier. Fitting it had been a fiddly job, and a nut had dropped into a crevice in the engine, but had been retrieved. People were distinctly flagging in the warm afternoon, when lunch was called at 2.30... **RC**

### Next Month

**After Lunch! Can the crew get the Matchless complete before their deadline? Find out in next month's thrilling conclusion...**



Steve learns the noble art of kickstarting a 750cc Atlas engine