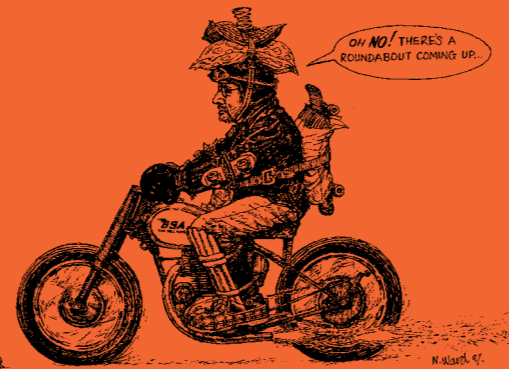


DOWN THE ROAD BEAT THE CLOCK!

with Steve Wilson



Steve joined some Essex Boys hoping to dismantle, renovate, rebuild and run, a military Matchless ... in just twelve hours. Will they do it?

In Part One, everyone worked hard, then broke for lunch. Part Two: A Result!

Photos by Roy Bellett, Alan Jennings, Steve Wilson

It was definitely a Real Classic sort of thing...

The Second Half

Hot and cold drinks, pies and slices, taken on the veranda behind the house, were quickly restorative. I chatted to young Josh Bellett and learned that Billericay Coachworks where he's employed had supplied all the painting materials (masking tape, etc), while Romford motorcycle paint specialists Leonard Brooks (01708 342560) had provided the actual paint, at a heavily discounted price. Josh himself is a twist'n'go Ace Café boy now, and

told me a lurid tale of a female Yamaha R1 rider at the Ace in high heels and no helmet, who'd lost the plot, along with half her face.

The crew were hard at it again by 3 o'clock, and the engine was back in. Engine bolts had to be drifted in, and there was uncertainty about where each should go. Roy consulted the dour engine maestro Dave Pratt, and got 'I don't know everything'. In the end Ron the electrician had the answer. Dave was rebuilding the rear hub. 'Can't use these new brake shoes, they're too big. Pattern parts! Anyone know where the originals are?'

That was what got used. But the mood was much jollier now, as the bike came together. The forks were being built up at the front, with much mirth as the damping rods were hooked out with bent wire. The engine bolts were going in, without washers if necessary, just to get them to fit. Roy handed me the old silencer and exhaust; wafer-thin and with no internals, they were no weight at all.

By 3.45 urgency had returned, as problem after small problem arose. The dynamo wouldn't go back in; it had to be inserted and turned because of the shaft, but it couldn't be



While others wrestle with a frame, Josh Bellett is busy prepping the petrol tank for its drab green coat



What a way to cure your paint! Hang it in a sauna...

turned because something was in the way. The brake rod stud and its nut, which hadn't been present, had to be sourced. Fitting the front wheel proved tricky; the bike was back on its stand but still roped to the ceiling, and rocking as it was worked on.

Peter Bearman had worked steadily re-fitting the old speedo cable, only to be told that a new one was going on; and then that item needed filing to fit. Next Peter was patiently fitting one of the pillion footrests, when Pete the Paint said 'Something don't look right with that footrest hanger. It's got to come up more. It's not touching the stop on the frame – it's bent, see? Take it off, and I'll put it in a vice and straighten it.' By 4 o'clock Dennis Fox was shaking his head at 'all these little last minute bits,' as everyone worked intently.

The timing and dynamo drive chains had to be aligned correctly. Someone noticed that the front mudguard was wrong – the 1955-on type without a front stay. But all the tinware was so shapely – the tank, the rear chainguard, that mudguard itself.

As usual, fitting the centrestand spring was a pain. 'We're going to have to take the stand off and then lift it in again,' said Roy. 'The alternative is removing the engine!' There were still terrific shenanigans lifting the bike on the bench to get the spring on. Then there was a problem with the back gearbox securing bolts, with Roy at first unable to get more than half of the thread through to the far side. But by 4.15 the headlamp was back on, though Ron the electrician then complained because he'd wanted to do that himself. A little later for no reason there was a moment's

silence, until someone murmured ironically 'All gone quiet...don't like that...'

'Which oil pipe is which?'

'Ron'll know.'

'Top one goes return.' Roy with a torch then decided he had to loosen off the toolbox because he couldn't get the feed pipe in.

Fork oil was fetched. 'Anyone know how much goes in each fork leg? Any advance on 6 fluid ounces?'

'There's a book there.'

'O we're not going to books now.'

The correct amount turned out to be 6 1/2 fl ozs. Then the book said 6 fl ozs, if you'd

drained them. But the forks had been emptied and cleaned, so 6 1/2 it was. Ron Mathers held the fork oil jug over Dennis Fox's head, saying 'You'll prefer this to Brylcreem.' He added 'This bike'll go round left-handers all right – it's got more oil in that fork leg...'

By 4.30 Ron the electrician, after poring over the wiring diagram, was refitting the regulator. The cleaned-up carb was going back on, with a big spacer. The number plate and the big 'L' nationality sign was to be riveted back on. 'What's 'L' for – Lousy?' 'L for Leather, more like.' Roy, working the rivet punch, clutched his breast. 'I got me tit!'



Where it all started. One very original and entirely unrestored G3 Matchless



ABOVE: How's this for a fine al fresco paintshop? BELOW: Outside in the fresh air, Dave and Ron are hard at it, priming mudguards



Painted parts laze in the sun awaiting their turn to be re-fitted



It all starts again. Reassembly is the opposite of disassembly...



Dave Pratt and John Puttock align the G3's piston



'OK. Where does this go?'



'Will this ever be finished? Will it be finished on time?'

'I want to go next!'

'Line up, line up!'

Mini-crisis followed mini-crisis. They found that the oil pipes should have gone on the other side of the stand. Then it was 5 o'clock and some people started leaving. I hit my own little problem – with three hours still to go, enthusiastic snapping had left me with just five shots in the camera (no digital nonsense here). But Roy came up with a film. Then they found that the footrests, being the inboard kind, should have gone on before the inner chaincase.

With the speedo and steering damper on, Dave Pratt started refitting the clutch, calling for the cable. It turned out that the new cable didn't have the original's split ferrule, which Alan told me you needed, to be able to thread the cable through narrow openings. At 5.30 Dennis, filling the oil tank with straight 50, asked 'Is the sump plug in?'

With the footrests going back on, and the headlamp internals, Roy asked 'Have we timed it?' 'No, it's all loose.'

A final through-bolt was nearly through. 'I'll just keep pushing from this side...'

'One more push, mother.'

As the shadows lengthened outside, the hut was filled with an extraordinary gallery of faces, almost Biblical in their cheerful or rapt concentration.

A small green modern battery and some foam came out of a cupboard to go into the black battery case. Roy, up on the bench at the front of the bike, said loudly 'Bear in mind the handlebars are going on, so keep your heads down.'

'O no, not the handlebars!'

'The wire for the hooter is too short.'

'How too short is it?' One of the new cables, on the other hand, was too long.

'Chuck it and use the old one.'

One of the quietly constant workers had been tall, self-effacing Dave Kewell. Dennis had told me that Dave had been a top man with Ford, jetting all over the world. Now Roy said 'Dave done the tappets, so Dave can do the timing.' Dave began to describe what he would do. 'Well just do it,' laughed Roy, 'don't write a book about it!'

Last Gasp

Six o'clock, two hours to go, and the problems were coming faster.

'That clutch cable should have gone through that hole. It'll have to come off.'

And the chain, even though it was the old one, proved too loose, so a link had to come out. And then someone moved the rear wheel

while Dave was doing the timing. And another cable needed its nipple filing to fit; 'another one that's no good – gimme the old one please.'

But a really major glitch began when Roy said, 'I've only got half a lever of clutch. Can you adjust it? And isn't there normally a ball in this system? The clutch on this was light as a feather, it worked perfectly.' Not now, though. 'That's as much as you got.' 'The clutch,' said Roy, 'is not lifting at all.'

They consulted the book. 'Is this a B52 or a CP box?' (The B52 Burman had been introduced for 1952.) 'It says the B52 has a 2-piece rod; but this one has a single long rod, with a dent in the end.' If a ball bearing was missing, Roy said he had a tin of them in the main garage, but that thought got lost as other problems came up, and over an hour would pass with the clutch still not working.

Someone came in with a new stoplight switch, but it had no back-plate, and it was then discovered that the old one's back-plate was missing too. In the meantime Roy had been diverted to the front of the bike again. 'Gimme more, gimme more – just a quarter inch more cable. That's it! We got a front brake.'

The carb was sticking. 'I dunno what's jamming it?'

'Most probably that back-plate you can't find...'

By 6.30 there was a feeling of floundering. The clutch was still u/s, and more things were missing, though nothing major. Then came a cry of 'Found it!' The stoplight switch back-plate, after painting, had been dropped in the grass. But more people had to go now. His mates asked Keith Gray if he couldn't stay, and tell his wife he'd broken down. There was a big laugh as he came back with 'Mentally, I did break down!'

Roy was back adjusting the clutch springs. 'Next week we're stripping it down and building it again,' he joked, 'now that we know what we're doing...' But by 6.45 the clutch pushrod was still not moving at all. 'No, look, the turn-round on the cam has jumped off at the gearbox end.' With that seen to, they had some movement, and Roy could now readjust the clutch. While he was doing so, Dennis went to re-fit the toolbox, and Roy, still working, reminded him about some necessary spacers. Then Karen's voice called: someone else's wife was on the phone for them.

'We still ain't got no clutch,' Roy told Dave Pratt on the other side of the bike. 'I can just



Come together... The engine and gearbox are back in the frame



Nearly there. It's time for checks and adjustments

feel it, if I adjust it up...' And then, 'Dave, the extension piece with the clevis isn't coming through far enough. There's definitely something missing.' Roy went out while someone else unscrewed the springs again. Then Roy sprinted in again after a couple of minutes, panting.

'Here we are,' and displayed a glistening ball bearing. 'It was in the cleaning tank.' Other people had already looked there. It was 7.05. Roy said, 'Dave, pull the rod out, shove the ball in there and put it back.' Within a minute they had an operating clutch. 'It's working with just one finger.' 'Ah,' said Roy, 'I'm coming over all funny.'

They were down to a hard core of ten people. Roy asked the men at the front, 'What you missing?'

'The top of the twistgrip.' Then there was a roar of laughter as Roy produced it from his trouser pocket. 'That's probably where the ball bearing was all along!'

By 7.15 they were quiet and tense. There should have been a spacer within the primary

chaincase. And the carb was not sorted yet. But Alan had arrived with the new black-painted exhaust system, and a non-stock throttle assembly of Roy's was fitted and working. There was no choke cable, and now it was needed, so Roy just taped the air cable up and mounted it loosely on half a lever they'd found. The choke cable was wrong anyway. 'I can't believe it – not one new cable has worked.'

'To stand any chance of firing it up by 8,' said Roy, 'we've got to get it off the bench in the next ten minutes.'

'Anyone seen the clevis pin for the rear brake?' It never did turn up, so they bolted it together. By 7.25 the battery and exhaust system were going on. The horn worked! The headlight worked! The tail-light didn't, needing an earth, but 'we're not too bothered about electrics now.'

By 7.35 in a tense and excited atmosphere, the petrol tank was on and the seat was being offered up. 'Those seat bolts have to come right out of the top of the jampots. Who said

Lighting up time!
INSET: There is always a final adjustment...



deeply regretted having left my riding boots in the car so I couldn't have a go. The rain got harder; faces looked out from the shed where they'd taken shelter.

And every face lit up when at 7.53, the bike came to life. There was a cheer, even as it cut out again. It fired up once more, and ran for a bit longer, and in my book that was it, they'd done it. OK, Roy didn't get to ride it round the field as he'd hoped, but it had run, and that had been the mission statement. Next day it would also pass its MoT. And whatever Lucinda thought, it now looked a treat.

After that I had a three hour drive to do. It had been a long day, but was I exhausted? No – high as a kite, actually. People say I don't get out enough, and they're probably right; because, as I hope I've conveyed, there had been something about the camaraderie of that day, the guys all working together for the fun of it, which had been, in the words of the advert, 'priceless'. It called to mind the old Bob Dylan song:

*'I wish, I wish, I wish in vain
'That we could sit simply in that room
again.
'Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat
'I'd give it all gladly, if our lives could
be like that.'* **RC**

the seat brackets would just slide down?'
'You did!'

'Well I lied.' A desperate struggle ensued, involving a wire in the way. By this time I was silently willing them to succeed.

7.45, and the Matchless was lifted down off the bench. As the bike was wheeled out into the dark, the commotion attracted Karen and Lucinda, who in full teenage mode cried 'It don't look much different!'

Drops of rain began to fall, and was that lightning? No, just camera flashes. With gas in the tank, Roy gave it three kicks, but the kickstarter wasn't biting. 'Clutch is slipping,' he said, and dropping to his knees, unscrewed the small circular cover in the primary chaincase and began adjusting the springs with the clutch tool.

With less than ten minutes to go, someone else took over the kickstarting; I



The finished article. A rebuild done in a day, one single day!