

MOTOR CYCLE NEWS

scoop test



Cagiva Alazzurra 650

**NORVIN CAFÉ
black magic**



DRAN PARK SUPERBIKES

250 ENDURO COMPARISON



**MAICO
SE250LC**

**YAMAHA
IT250**

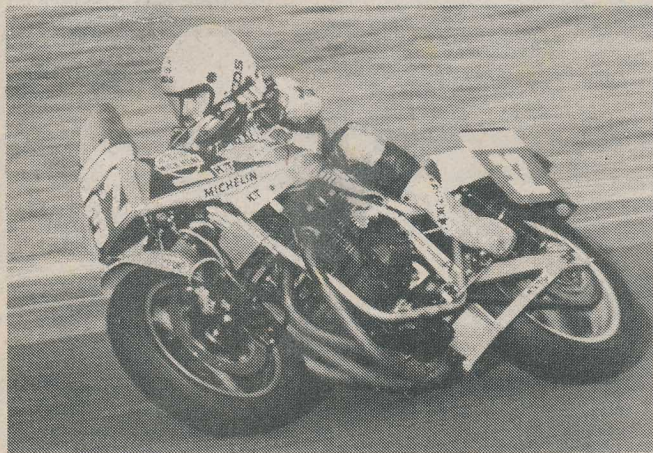
**KAWASAKI
KDX250**

**HONDA
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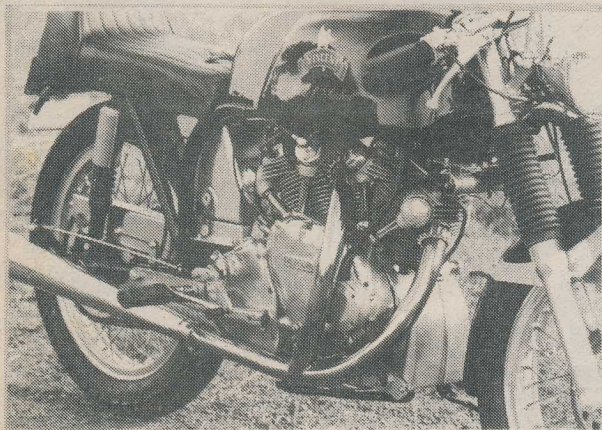
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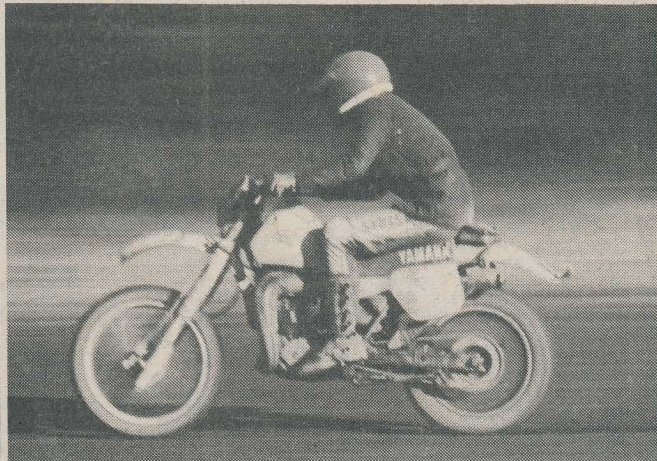


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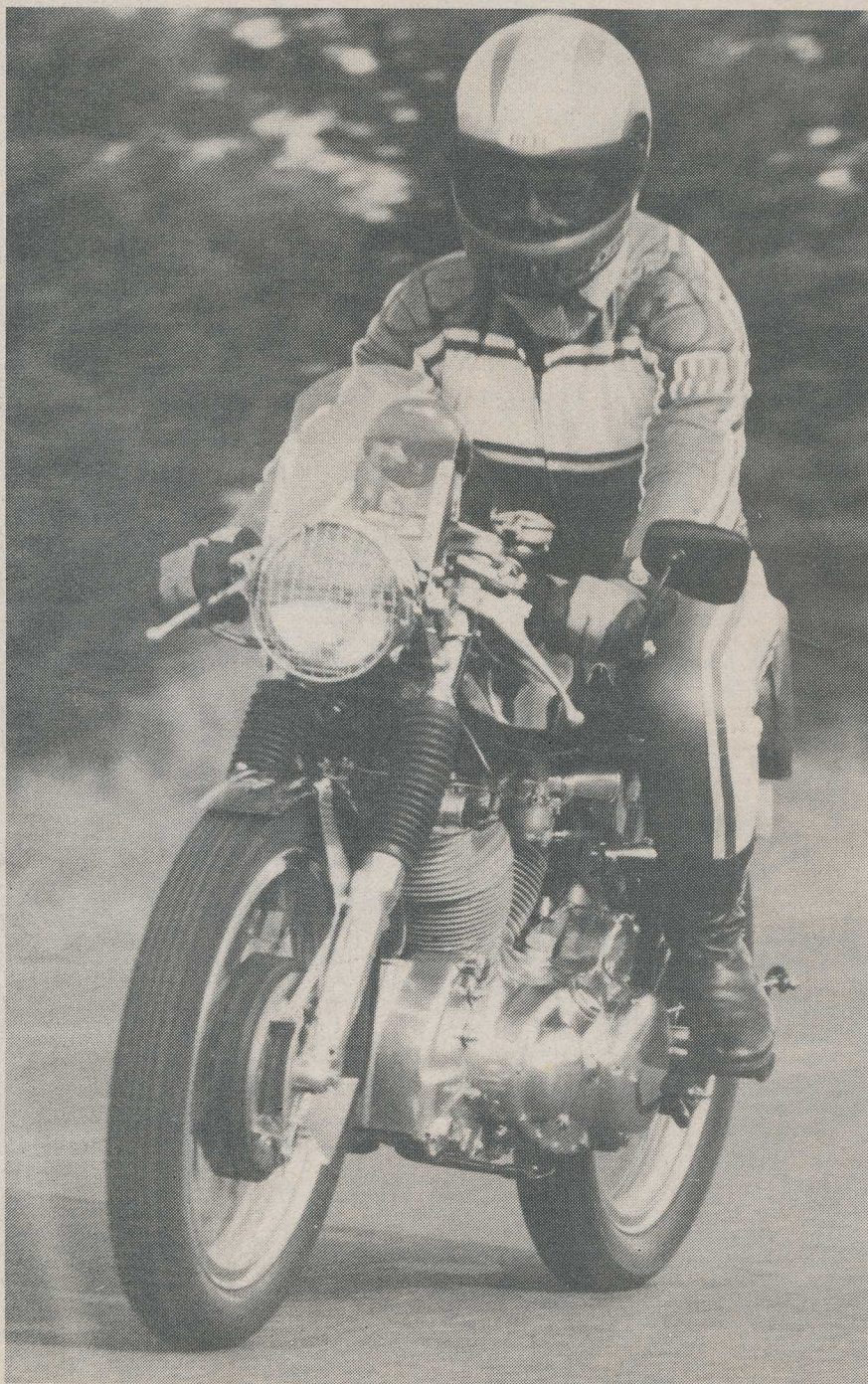
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Cover: Cagiva's new sportster (that's an exclusive, folks!), the mighty Norvin cafe racer and four of the best enduro mounts in the country. Photos respectively by Alan Cathcart, Lou Martin and Mike Hanlon.

NORVIN



Motorcyclists are nothing if not individualists, often modifying their machines to enhance the individuality by improving performance and/or appearance. The sixties spawned the concept of the 'Cafe Racer', machines ranging from mild, racer styled dress-ups to mixing and matching frames and engines. This latter, more committed approach, resulted in such things as Tritons and Tribsas — Triumph engines with Norton and BSA frames respectively.

But the epitome of this concept, and every boy racer's dream of the time, must surely have been the Norvin. The Norvin matched England's finest engine — the magnificent all-alloy Vincent V-twin — with the legendary Norton 'featherbed' frame in order to create the ultimate sixties special.

The particular example featured here is rather unique in the method of mating the massive power unit to the frame. The common method was to hack off the Vincent's rear engine mounts, or even the complete gearbox if one wished to use an AMC box, and just fabricate new engine mounts.

Fortunately, given the greater number of Norton featherbeds around than Vincent engines, great forethought, skill and care has been taken in this case, the surgery being restricted entirely to the featherbed frame.

In order to clear the rear cylinder head, a wideline chassis is mandatory for any Norvin conversion. In this example the front down-tubes have been cut away from the steering head and tubing has also been removed from below the swingarm area enabling the engine to sit both lower and further forward. By fabricating engine mounts below the steering stock and again at the rear of the top frame rails the engine is suspended beneath frame as in the engine's original chassis.

Further bracing beneath the swingarm pivot provides the lower engine mounting point. The result of all this can be seen in cleaner appearance, a still original power unit and no loss of chassis rigidity — the whole idea of using the featherbed in the first place.

Similar craftsmanship and forethought is evident in the rear wheel set-up. A Vincent QD rear wheel is used, being a twin drum arrangement which allows a different size sprocket to be carried on each seven-inch drum. The original idea of such an arrangement is that the gearing can be simply altered by swapping the wheel from one side to the other, merely reversing the wheel's direction of rotation. In this application however, the builder went to the trouble of adapting Vincent front backing plates so that the speedometer could be driven off the rear wheel.

Both the rear drums are employed in active service by utilising twin rods and a cross-over shaft, resulting in a smooth, yet powerful, rear braking system ably matched by a twin leading shoe AJS 7R racing hub on the front.

In the go department the big Vinnie has been completely rebuilt with lightened and balanced conrods and flywheels, Omega 7.5:1 compression pistons and an Alpha caged big-end assembly in place of the standard triple roller big-ends. Valve sizes are stock while the cylinder heads have been matched to a pair of 32mm Amal concentric Mk1 carbs and gas flowed.

In order to prevent breaking through to the inner rocker tunnel on the rear cylinder head, the front one is used on the rear pot. This has the additional advantage of offering a better port angle.

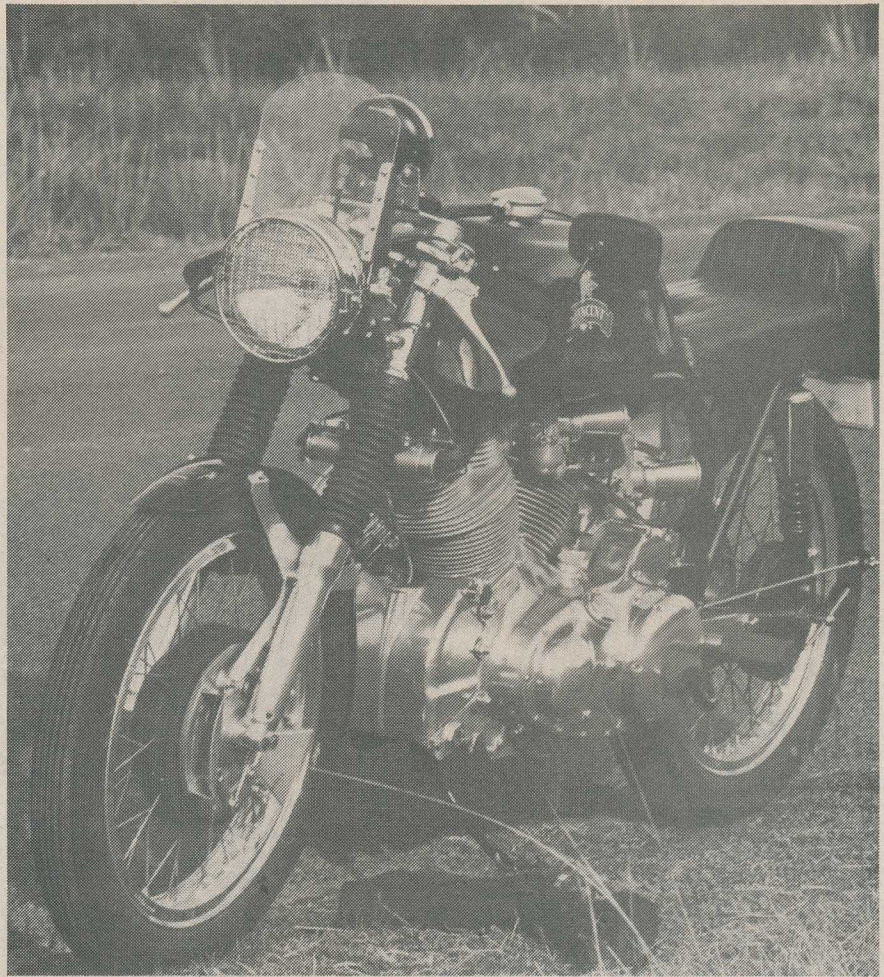
Standard Mk3 cams are used and, when combined with the low compression ratio, produce a very tractable and reliable engine. Ignition is via a six-volt battery-powered Lucas Dolphin system utilising twin contact-breaker points and twin coils specifically designed for 50-degree V-twin Vincents. Incorporated in the design is rev-counter drive slot and manual advance/retard control.

As a motorcycle, the Norvin is very much a macho machine, having incredible appeal to enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts alike. This bike, supplied from the private collection of Frank Hodder from Eurotred, is one of the finest examples in the world, and not just due to the extreme care and skill which went into its construction — it is also immaculately presented.

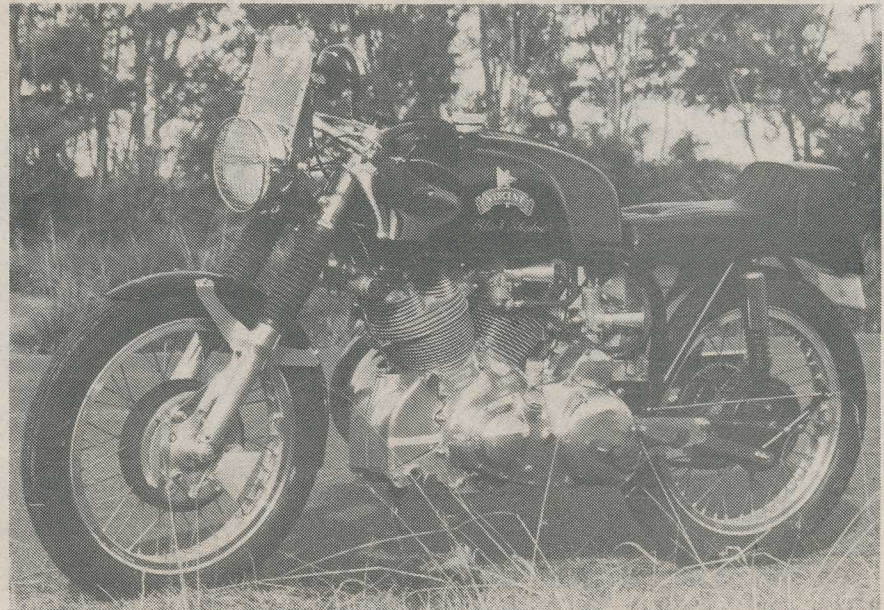
All the alloy components are polished to a high lustre, as are the stainless steel parts which abound on the bike: things like the siamesed exhaust pipes, wheel spokes, brackets and footpeg-cum-kick starter.

As can be seen from the photographs, the polished metal is tastefully offset by black enamel on the frame and the Manx replica fibreglass tank.

Compared to a modern machine of similar capacity the Norvin is quite small physically — a fact underlined by its dry weight of just over 400lbs, or 185kg.



Above and below: the ultimate cafe racer? The combination of Vincent power and Norton Featherbed frame is still considered by many to be the epitomy of that genre. Frank Hodder's Norvin is unique in that the usual method of mating the Vincent engine to the Norton frame (hacking off the Vincent engine mountings or even the complete gearbox) has been avoided. Instead, this particular installation allows the Vincent cases to remain intact; the engine hanging from the modified frame and acting as a stressed member, similar in concept to the original Black Shadow. The result is a cleaner appearance, an original powerplant, an no loss of chassis rigidity.



Feature

As a youngster I used to attend the various road race meetings at Calder, Winton and the now defunct Phillip Island and Victoria Park (Ballarat) circuits and see the big Vincents being wrestled by such as Alec Corner and Arthur Pimm. Awe inspiring sights indeed, and yet, when I came to ride the Norvin it seemed so small and mild-mannered compared to so many of the twins I have grown used to.

Set up in the classic boy-racer style, the clip-on handlebars were typically low and splayed too widely for good comfort and control. Similarly, the footrests felt too far forward, emphasising the chunkiness of the fuel tank between the knees. Ergonomically, the bike leaves a lot to be desired — but, like some bikes available off the showroom floor today, it was never meant as any kind of everyday hack.

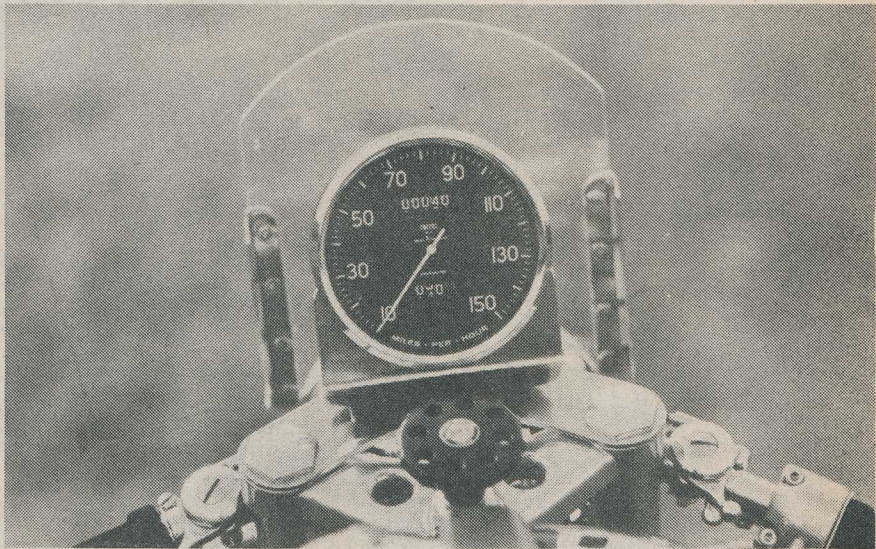
My first sight of the beast was when proud owner Frank Hodder wheeled it from his shed and set off down a long hill to bump start it — a wise move considering ambient temperature on that Sunday morning was somewhere on the low side of zero Celsius. Kick starting would likely have kept us there a little longer!

With the engine suitably warmed, I climbed aboard and we headed off

toward Warburton, first along the Maroondah Highway and then out along the Warburton road past Lilydale, east of Melbourne. Surprisingly, the engine was mechanically very quiet despite the two ram tubes feeding the carbs and poking from beneath the tank on the left side. Only a faint clatter emanated from the valve gear and the exhaust was muted to the point of excess. Frank has a Laverda SFC muffler which will replace the present item in the future.

The clutch action is surprisingly light, though the right-foot gearchange required some effort on up-changes into first gear. In spite of the cold there was no evidence of clutch drag and only a whiff of throttle was needed before it could be fed home and the bike move off.

Below: no metrics here thanks — we're British! Minimal instrumentation is one of the prerequisites of the cafe racer.



presented by

WILLOUGHBY DISTRICT MOTORCYCLE CLUB

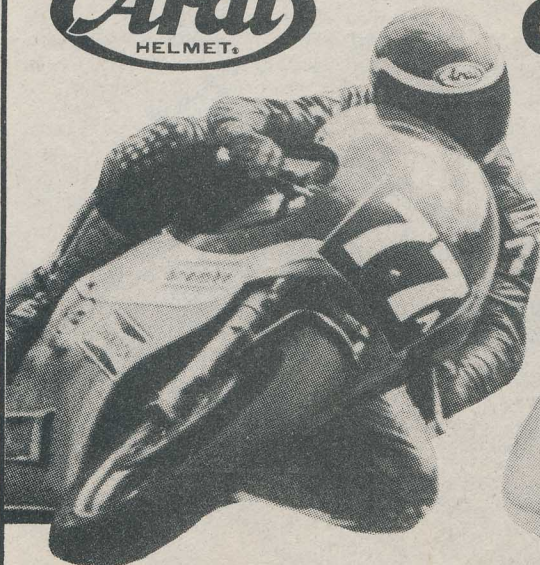
125, 250, 350, 500, SOLOS, 1000cc SIDECAR CHAMPIONSHIPS

250, 1000 PRODUCTION RACES
HISTORIC MACHINE RACE

1984 AUSTRALIAN ROAD RACE CHAMPIONSHIPS



**COMMENCING
— 10 A.M.**



AMAROO PARK — SUNDAY, 29th JULY

Keeping in mind the newness of the rebuilt engine, no liberties were taken with outright performance, but suffice to say that torque was by no means in short supply. At any speed the Vincent engine could swallow hills with only the barest change in throttle position.

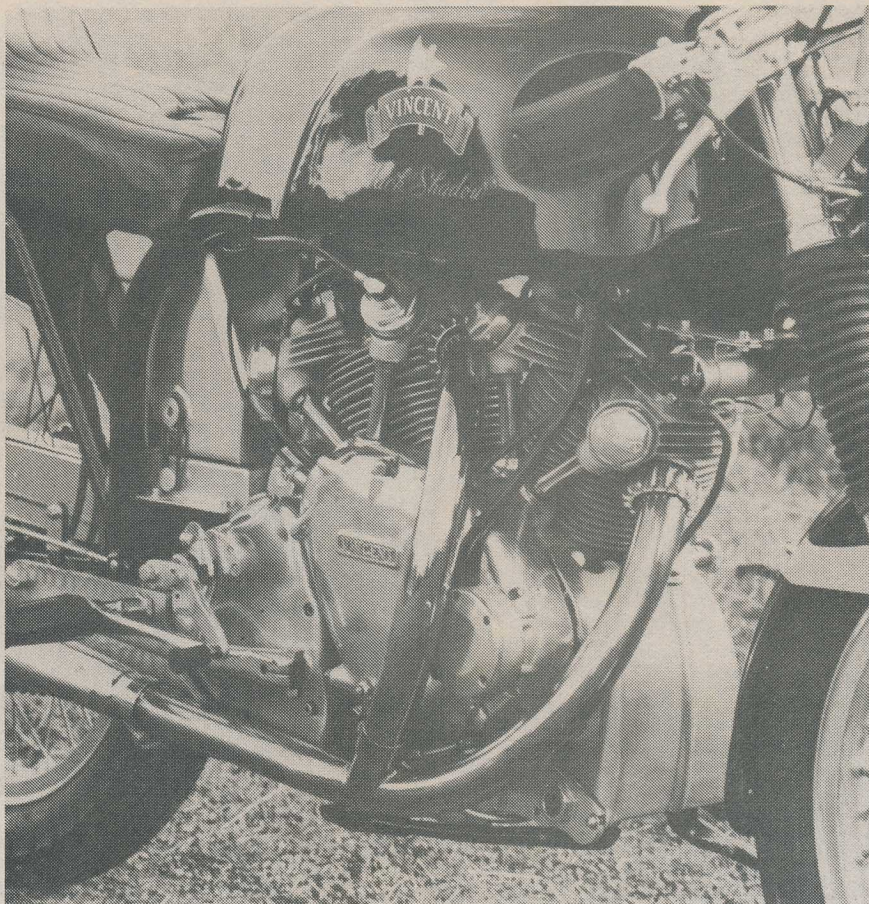
I do think the overall gearing was a little on the short side. Raising it would space out the gearchange points so a rider could revel in the broad spread of power and characteristic, lumpy exhaust note. In spite of enjoying many of the very latest machines available today, there really is nothing quite like that sound.

Through hilly country, 100kmh was maintained easily to the accompaniment of valve gear rustle and the thumping of the exhaust, yet I was equally interested in sampling the renowned Featherbed handling and steering — I wasn't disappointed. The somewhat old-fashioned, heavily ribbed front tyre would be partially responsible, but the lightness and directness of the steering was quite amazing. Once a line through a corner was chosen, the bike simply swept through 'on rails' with pin-point accuracy.

For obvious reasons, and my distrust of the front tyre, I was unable to put the handling to any more arduous test, but the bike tracked straight and true around bumpy 100kmh bends with a reassuringly steady feel. The ribbed front tyre tended to mask the effect of slow steering geometry initially, but this became more evident once the road became twistier — something like a big Ducati.

The suspension, consisting of Norton Roadholder forks and Girling rear dampers, is very much on the firm side and has only limited travel and quite strong damping characteristics. Yet on the road it proved surprisingly compliant with none of the harshness I would have expected.

The brakes proved more than adequate for my ride, especially the twin

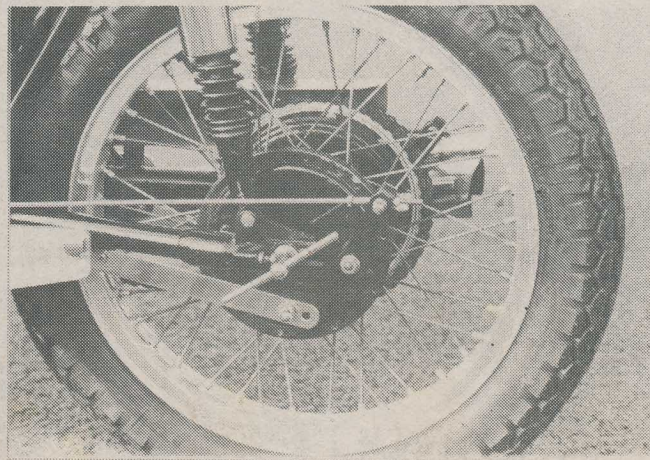


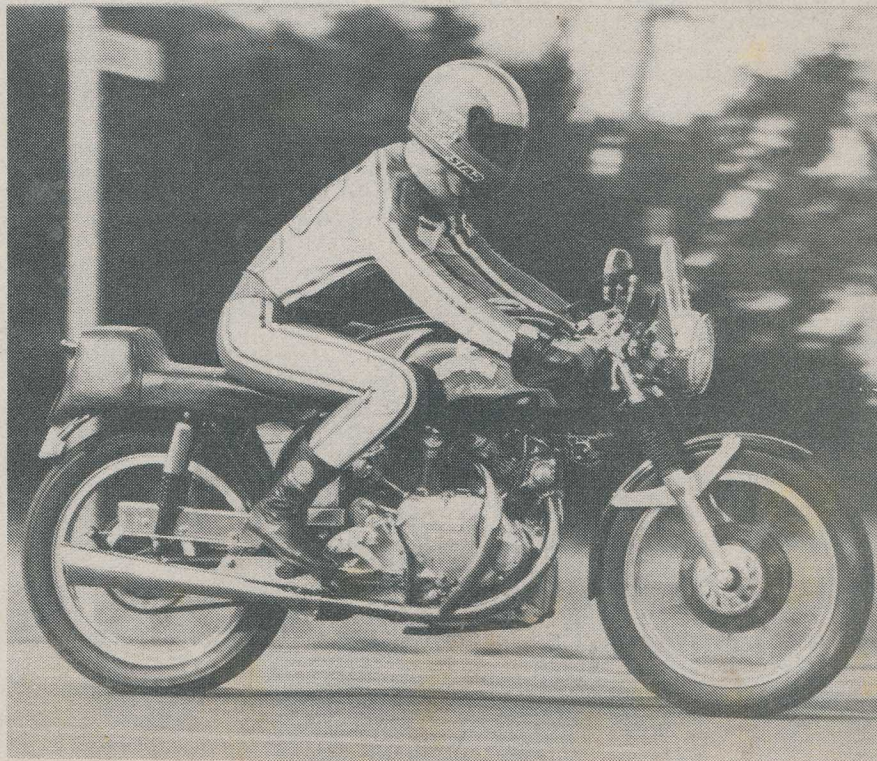
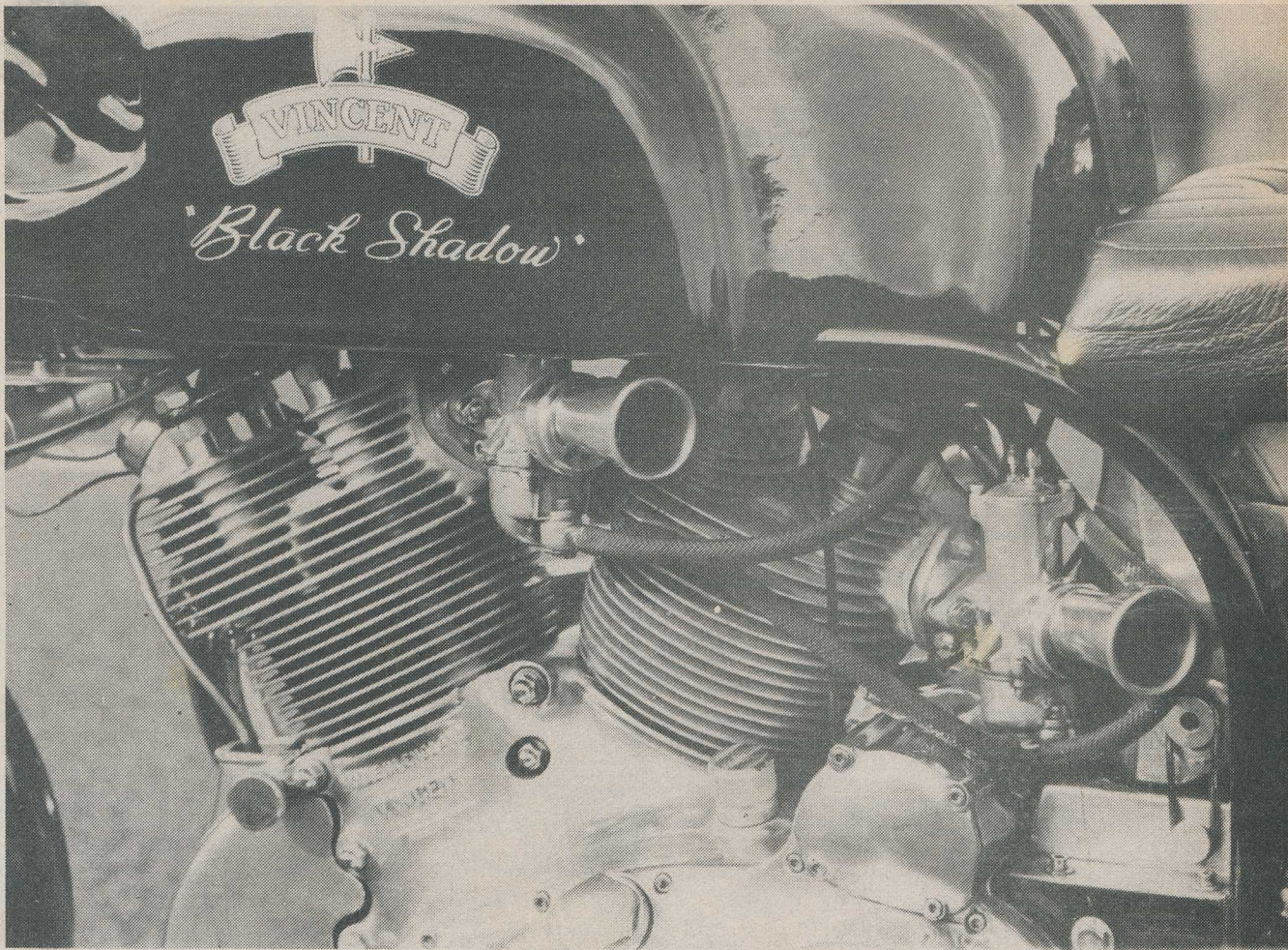
7-inch rears, but I was a little wary of the front when it began making the familiar squeal of a twin-leader with 'green' linings. By the end of the day that brake had become a little grabby at low speeds and would undoubtedly have benefitted from an easing of the shoes' leading edges.

Throughout the ride, and particularly during our photographic session, the Norton maintained its composure and never looked like complaining. At all times it was a breeze to start with just a short push and bump, only needing to be

Above: attention to detail extends to the engine. Internal work includes a complete rebuild, with lightened and polished con-rods and flywheels, Omega 7.5:1 pistons and an Alpha caged big-end assembly. Valves and cams are standard, while the mixture flows through gas-flowed and matched ports.

Below: the rear drum brake is in fact two Vincent front brakes, employing a crossover shaft to operate both sides in unison. The result is smooth and powerful. Below left: front brake is a powerful, twin leading shoe unit off an AJS 7R racer.





Above: the engine breathes through a pair of 32mm Amal concentric Mk1 carbs with minimal restriction offered by the spun alloy bellmouths.

Left: the Norvin's looks were matched by its surprising agility. Through the tighter sections of the test ride, we were impressed by the lightness and directness of the steering. Also, the Norton Roadholder forks and Girling rear dampers proved surprisingly compliant, despite limited travel.

drawn back on rear cylinder compression first. The first time, every time starts were the result of light weight, clean clutch separation, good ignition and a comparatively mild state of tune.

Overall, this Norvin is a credit to its creator and a monument to the British motorcycle art. It offers strong, reliable performance, gut-wrenching sound and superb handling and steering. Apart from the relevant ergonomic problems and the fact that it would have trouble sticking to a good 750SS Ducati, it must rate as the ultimate statement of the British sports motorcycle — a true classic and one awe-inspiring machine.

Martin Hone

photos: Lou Martin