

THE SIX CARDBOARD boxes sat in the middle of a badly lit attic holding the remains of a once proud Norton Twin, now rusting and unrecognisable under the layers of dirt and oil.

Despite the crud, it still seemed possible to me to get the basis for my hill-climber from the pile of bits since the Norton had all the right qualities: light weight, lotsa power and torque over a wide spread of revs, all coupled with good handling.

A hill-climb course is enough to test any rider or bike with tarmac surfaces varying from bad to awful, bumpy reverse camber corners, tight hairpins and short straights all calling for snappy acceleration and sharp braking to the very limits of a machine's ability.

I'd never looked at a Norton before, having had illusions about Isolastic (Isospastic) handling, migratory main bearings and a host of other lurking trouble spots. There was nothing for it but to pick up the Old Testament (Haynes Manual), look at the pretty pictures and say, well, that bit looks like it goes there, and that looks like that bit . . .

I got stuck in places — such as when this funny looking thing wouldn't go anywhere. It later turned out to be from a car clutch! I ended up with two piles; those bits to be used and those to be junked.

The frame came under close scrutiny and the top tube just yelled out, 'Please make me into an oil tank,' whereas the back half that holds the mudguard said, 'I don't belong here, I'm much too heavy, and I don't really do anything.' So, as I was walking past with the hacksaw, I accidentally sawed this bit off, making it look much nicer.

When I came to the motor, things were not as bad as expected. The pistons were cracked, a few odds and sods

needed renewing, but I decided that a complete rebuild was in order. I filled half a notebook with a list of parts needed.

Buying Norton spares was, I found, a new experience. If I asked for 'That thingy that holds the fork damper tube to the upper thingy,' the guy would respond, 'Oh yeah mate, I've got 37,000 of them.' I'd be greatly cheered by this, only to learn that a rear brake cable was absolutely unheard of.

Trying to finance a project like this while remaining a student on a very meagre grant, went something like this: at 10.30am on the first day of term, I'd get my grant cheque; 10.45am, I'd pay it into the bank; at 11.00am, I'd spend the bloody lot on Norton parts. Thus I gave up women, beer, going out/seeing my mates, and spent all my time working on the Creation, which for no apparent reason was renamed the

Dingbat.

The Dingbat was to have the following basic format: single seat, small tank, high wide 'bars, TT100s, soft suspension on gas shocks, open pipes, rear sets, 18 inch rear wheel, and loads of ground clearance. It was to have no mudguards, battery, sidepanels, chainguard, chaincases (these were later added) no instruments and no lights.

The motor (a 750cc Combat) got some heavy breathing. I gasflowed the head and had the valve seats recut. The inlet tracts were then blended, so that they fitted on to the head with no step to get in the way. Every surface was lapped by hand on an old mirror. If one thing is more boring than Dallas it's this job, but for a leak-free motor it must be worth it.

The barrels were bored with new pistons fitted and the fins

received Sperex matt black (cooked in the oven — it's alright, mother dear, the smell will soon go away). The con-rods were mirror polished to relieve stress and new shells fitted. Although the main bearings appeared to be okay, since Combat Nortons blow them up for a pastime, I took the precaution of replacing them.

The biggest job was the extensive modification of the scavenge system so that when things start spinning nice 'n' fast, the oil doesn't escape the pick-up. Later Norton Commandos had this modification as standard.

I was lucky to get the latest improved clutch with the bike; this had the sintered plates and hardened centre. Being a diaphragm clutch, I decided that it was well up to the job. The gearbox in the bike had what seems to be a common fault on older models — the mainshaft bearing had disintegrated. So, new bearings all round and a thorough check over.

Having heard stories about drive chains snapping and rear wheels collapsing when accelerating hard, true or not, I'd no intention of finding out! The remedy for the chain was obvious — Renold GP. The back wheel had already posed a few problems, namely on a 19 inch rim, a 4.10 inch tyre was the widest available, whereas an 18 inch rim would take a nice fat 4.25 inch low profile rubber. An alloy rim would have to wait until I could afford it, so I built up a steel rim with eight gauge spokes — boy, do they look pretty!

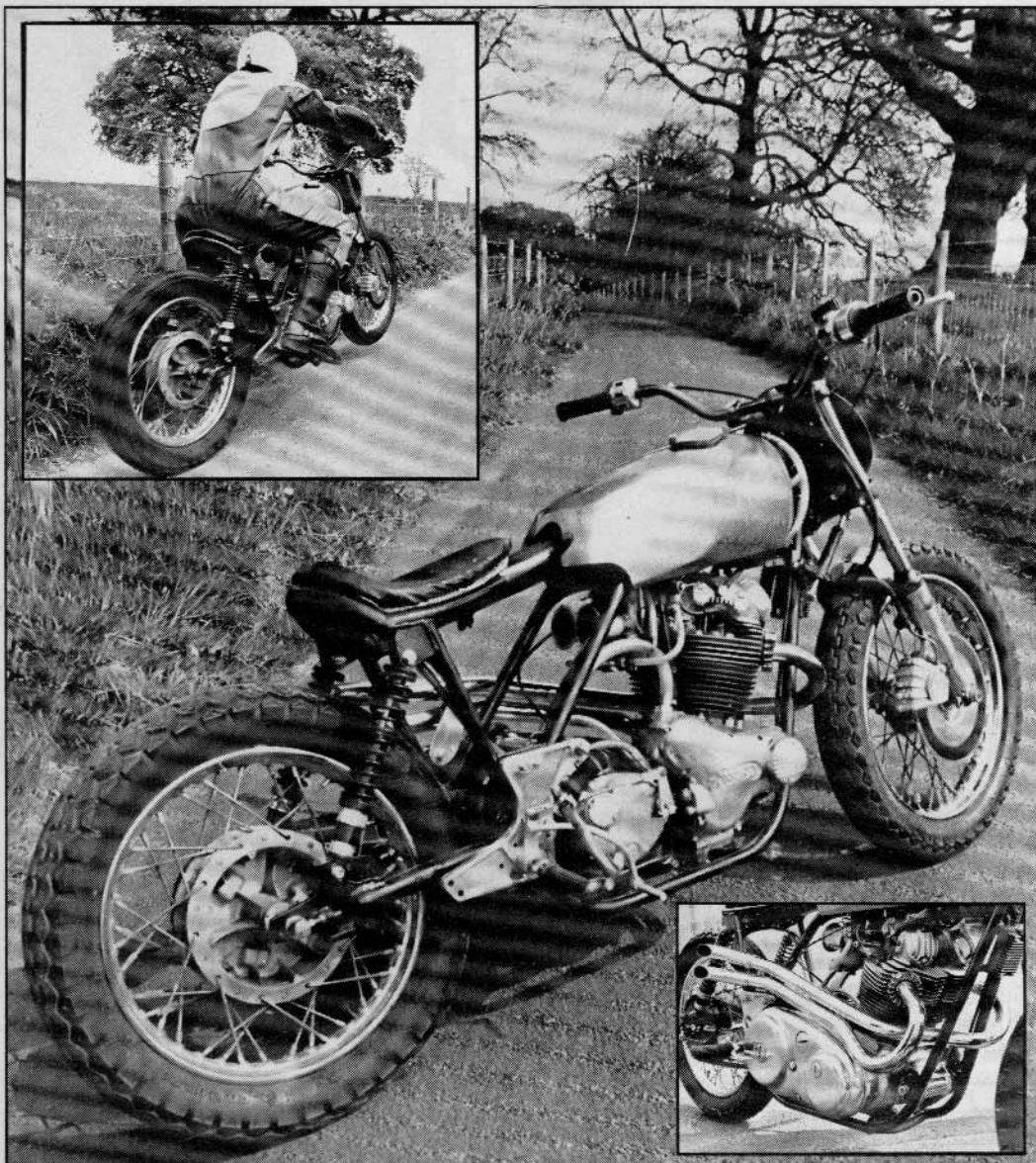
All the spanner-work was done in my bedroom (the attic), something that is definitely to be recommended as I found that waking up in the morning to the sight of such a beautifully purposeful projectile actually clears the gloom from the monotony of another day. After three and a half months things had shaped up. The chassis was



NORTON 'CLIMBER FROM THE ATTIC

PATRICK HOOK CAME ACROSS A PILE OF
JUNK THAT, IN HIS MIND, RESEMBLED
A HILL-CLIMB NORTON SPECIAL.

HERE'S HIS OWN TALE OF REINCARNATION . . .



season, are of a bike that'll let you do really insane things, like finding first gear at 60mph, half-way round a hairpin in the wet. In a year I haven't fallen off it — famous last words!

I spent my winter prettifying up the beastie: the main engine plate, the head steady, the front motor mount, and a lot of detail parts have been chromed. All the nuts and bolts have been replaced with either chrome from Custom Fasteners or stainless steel from Dave Middleton. An 'S' type exhaust ensures that there are no grounding problems and also looks pretty.

I've completed three events this year, Hartland Quay here in Devon, St Audrey's Bay in Somerset, and Wadebridge in Cornwall. My main problem now is that I have made the bike too pretty and I don't want to risk falling off it. Things got a bit hairy at Wadebridge because the snow meant that you couldn't see where you were going!

To make the Dingbat lighter and less complicated, I've fitted an American electronic unit called a Voltpak, intended for use on choppers. This finned alloy box replaces the rectifier, regulator, battery, Zener diode, capacitor and ballast resistor, and is only the size of a cigarette packet.

The whole lot is going to come apart now and I'll fit a dual seat, stove enamel the frame and bead blast various engine parts, so that in my sillier moments I can use the Dingbat on Her Majesty's Highways.

Plans for the future include a 920cc motor, using Mk III crankcases, and a one piece Robin Rhind-Tutt crank. This'll be some time coming though. Mind you, 90bhp at the back wheel, 320lb weight with torque to match — I ought to start saving those pennies right now. What vices have I got left that I can give up? There must be one somewhere, ah yes, 38½p goes on cream cakes, now if I save 38½p a week for ten years . . .

complete with the oil sitting nicely in the top tube, steering damper mounts fitted, the seat made up, the Isospastics were shimmed to one thou (ten is standard) and the rear sets installed.

The swing arm received some modification. I made steel plates to extend the shock absorber mountings forward, these were welded in place and now give a choice of three positions. Hassles were thankfully few; the worst I think was the seized inner piston on the brake caliper (yet another Norton weak point) but with much sweating this was overcome.

By this time I had three weeks to go before the start of the season — I didn't make it but borrowed a mate's Norton Roadster. Four days before the second meet, the Dingbat fired up. I smiled for the first time in months, it sounded luvverly! By midnight Saturday I pronounced it semi-roadworthy.

On the day it needed four people to bump start it down a

steep hill in third gear. It ran well for five minutes and then started coughing, missed for a couple of minutes and then died. Every time the plugs were changed, it ran, then died. The carburation was up

“It went so fast that all the little deficiencies showed up”

the creek due to sticking float pins and generally the day was a total disaster, but the bike still looked beautiful.

The misfire took ages to trace, wasting all the time and effort of four meetings. It had to be the

black box for the electronic ignition so I threw it away, and things livened up, in more ways than one. It went so fast that all the little deficiencies showed right up — the brakes left a lot to be desired and the suspension was, er, firm. But worst of all was the gearbox's unnerving habit of finding neutral at the wrong moment — like at an airfield in Cornwall at a circuit sprint. I was heading from 90mph into a bend when what should have happened is that I panic-braked, stuck it down three gears and peeled off for the corner, only it didn't quite work like that because after the second gearchange it went into neutral and I went straight on — into a field. At a Bent Sprint at Wadebridge, I went straight through a gathering of people who were standing in a run-off area (it could only happen at a hill-climb), nearly wiping out a mate.

My impressions of riding the beast now, after a complete