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RADICAL SLICK
Riding the 160 mph Feet First Thirteen



**REMEMBER THE QUASAR? NOW
ITS FAST FUTURISTIC SHAPE
IS BACK WITH A KAWASAKI
Z1300 MOTOR PROVIDING THE
STOMP. INVENTOR MALCOLM
NEWELL LET BRECON QUADDY
OUT ON IT.**

BEST FEET FORWARD

SOME PEOPLE call it the English Triangle — that area bounded roughly by Avebury, Glastonbury and Stonehenge where strange beliefs and customs still flourish and a change in the wind raises the hairs on the back of your neck. Weird things happen there; bizarre forms float past you in the gathering dusk. I never used to believe in the latter — until I rode one.

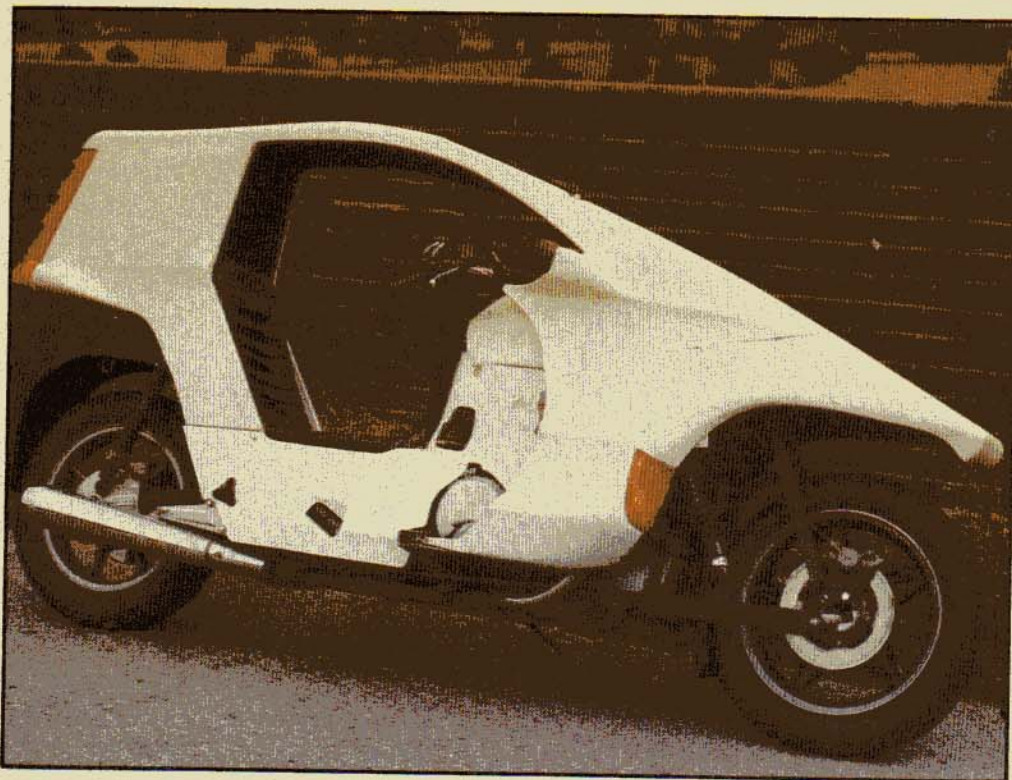
I bet I scared the hell out the Marina driver. He must have spotted the ghostly white object gliding up behind him along a spooky stretch of the A4 which cuts past Avebury's prehistoric stone circle. Then it suddenly emitted a blaze of light and shot past him, flipping through the bends round Silbury Hill at incredible speed before disappearing over the next brow. No wonder people believe in UFO's.

Malcolm Newell's latest creation had done it again. Of all the two-wheeled exotica I've ridden — specials, Harleys, Bimotas — you name it — nothing, but nothing, has had such a profound effect on so many people in so short a time as the white Thirteen. In tandem with one of the 17 Quasars made in the '70s, it came second in attention-grabbing potential only to having large ears and a new kid called Henry.

I hadn't particularly planned to be zapping the inhabitants of Wiltshire on the Zed: I actually rang my long-lost boyhood playmate Paul Blezzard to find out how he was getting on with DiFazio/Creasey CX500 Flying Banana only to discover that, like all Feet First fanatics, he'd been lured back into the triangle for a while. The Banana proved to be back in Royce's hands for recuperation (some people's levels of mechanical sympathy are disgustingly low) and a carb conversion, while Paul was riding a trusting fool... er friend's Quasar. And Malcolm had this new Thirteen thing.

As if it didn't show in the machines he designs and builds, Malcolm Newell is one of life's originals. He's also a pretty amazing bloke. In the 16 years since he first started plotting the FF revolution he's been laughed at, ignored, taken to the cleaners and written-off as a crank dozens of times. Yet there's never a hint of resentment or trace of the misunderstood-genius-type whingeing which characterises so many innovators whose ideas haven't immediately been snapped up by industry and public alike.

Newell has the distinction of being the only person in over a decade to get an *all British* two wheel roadster into production. Count the foreign bits in a Hesketh or new Triumph and you'll see what I mean. Consider the radical nature of the product and his achievement was all the greater:



Sadly, the Quasar story ended bitterly after only 17 machines had been built and due to his uncertainty about what rights he still has to his own ideas (including the shape and name) Newell has been producing various open-top FFs — Phasars — for a while. The six cylinder Z1300 motor he was given by Kawasaki UK originally powered a Phasar, too, but now he's returned to first principles and roofed it. To FF-ers it's The Thirteen.

The Thirteen isn't as similar to a Quasar as outward appearances suggest. The riding position can't be made as comfortably feet forward as the Quasar since the transversely mounted six is so much wider than the in-line Reliant mill. More importantly, the Thirteen has a Bob Tait hub-centre steering system while the Quasar featured less satisfactory leading link forks.

If you've arrived at this point in the story still feeling unconvinced, you're in just the same state of mind as I was when Malcolm pulled over to swap the Thirteen for my 350LC. Faced with a choice between trying to keep up with the FF along twisting Wiltshire backroads or staying with photographer Kel Edge in his car, I'd elected for the latter (no pics, no feature). Malcolm retaliated with a lecture along the lines of you-don't-buy-LCs-if-you-make-decisions-like-that and left me to the Zed.

If one thing is true of all Feet First vehicles (Royce prefers to call them Advanced Single Tracks) is that all their bad points inevitably strike a novice before any of the advantages. That's because the hardest part at first is getting upright and moving off slowly. Since you sit barely 20 inches from the deck it seems impossible to find the leverage in your legs to heave the 700lb machine off its sidestand. 'Don't fight it, it'll come if you let it,' advised Malcolm, sounding like a Zen master telling an acolyte now to achieve enlightenment. After coming embarrassingly near dropping the beast I finally had it in the perpendicular but within a couple more stop/starts the procedure had completely ceased to be a problem. Next

stop Nirvana . . .

Moving away presents a similarly crucial problem because the very limited lock (just 35 degrees) and aforementioned absence of leg support ensure that should the Thirteen begin to topple you haven't a snowflake's of getting it back. In reality it's simply a case of muttering: 'He who hesitates is lost,' being generous with the throttle and quick off the clutch and chugging away. Malcolm said he was impressed but it wasn't a lot harder than launching Harley's decidedly FF Softail (May issue).

After that, following Malcolm over to a friend's house in Westbury was almost a doddle. The 1300 mill was a great help in that respect, since the lashings of power available anywhere in the rev range meant I could forget the motor and concentrate on riding (or is it driving?) the machine.

Settling back into the seat I found myself in a uniquely comfortable riding position (comparable only to a heavily-raked chop with a cissy bar behind the rider's seat). The bars felt perfectly sited at shoulder level and I looked over them at the fascia (standard Z1300 instruments) and through the screen at the road.

The handling takes some getting used to at first. Steering is heavy at low speed and retains its slow, deliberate feel up to the legal limit. The first few bends were pretty untidy since I couldn't work out how to set the Thirteen up for them. Only miles later did I acquire the knack of letting the machine do the work. The Thirteen won't snap into a turn like a 16in-front-wheeled motorcycle but you just pitch it in anyway knowing that the low centre of gravity and hub centre steering allow previously unheard of liberties to be taken on the way round if needed.

If you study the pic of the Thirteen's front end you'll see that it consists of two main components: a swinging arm coming horizontally forward from the frame, and an upright fork coming down at a steep angle from the front steering head hidden in the nose. Basically, the former takes care of

suspension and the latter does the steering but the two actions don't affect each other. Steering geometry remains constant under braking no matter how far the shocks compress due to weight transfer and since the suspension pivot lies in the direction of travel, there's no danger of the set-up bending backwards during crash stops (and believe me, you can see a standard Z1300's teles tucking in if you hit the anchors hard).

It's weird. Bumps, ridges and grooves — even fairly hard braking — in bends have very little effect on the Thirteen's willingness to stick to your chosen line. Yet a jerk on the bars flicks the 700lb plot instantly into a tighter or wider turn should some meandering dolt wander over the white line, with none of the kangaroo hops or wallowing you'd get on a tele-forked bike.

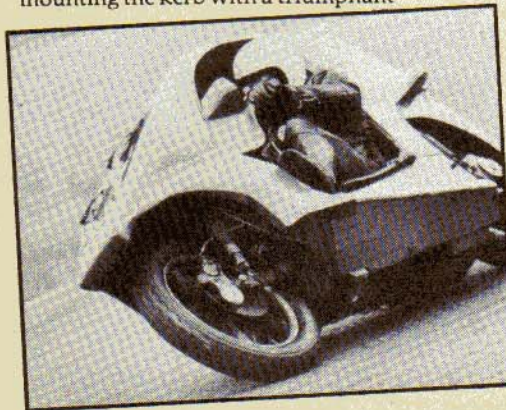
Within 20 miles of sitting in it for the first time I was more or less confident. Warm air wafted back from the motor while the streamlined shape produced very little wind roar despite the open sides, even at a steady 110mph. An occasional nudge on the bars, movement of throttle and whiff of brake were all that was needed to spin through bends or follow Paul, in the Quasar, past convoys of rubber-necking drivers.

The only annoying feature of the Thirteen is the size of the cockpit. Malcolm doesn't count great stature among his physical attributes and although the machine fits him like a glove I couldn't quite find enough headroom, especially in a bulky full face helmet. Tight, slow turns and town manoeuvres can be a fraught business as well, due to the balance factor and steering lock. Since there's never a handy lay-by or driveway when you need one, reverse gear might be a useful addition to the spec.

Swapping the Thirteen for the Quasar, the first impression was of the extra roominess since my feet slotted comfortably either side of the motor. Quasars have a curious ratchet gearshift operated by a split pedal (press the bottom half for down and the upper half for up) but once I mastered it it wasn't hard to steam along behind the Thirteen. Some idea of Malcolm's aerodynamic achievement can be gathered by experiencing the 100mph-plus speeds available from a motor using only 45bhp or so to propel a 690lb machine.

The Thirteen will top 160mph — the only limit being valve bounce. A proposed GPz1100 FF will be a lot quicker as its chain drive means it will be possible to gear up to suit.

Strikingly, the Quasar felt as right as the Thirteen although Paul had crashed it on a roundabout (carried away by the sight of Kel taking pics I guess) ten minutes earlier. Paul decked one of the retractable parking 'feet' just too hard and the Quasar was sent skating across the tarmac on its side, finally mounting the kerb with a triumphant



thump. Precisely the same train of events left us with a written-off Z1000R test bike last year but apart from chamfered mirror and stoplight pods, the only damage to the Quasar was a pretty bent running board. Paul suffered a grazed palm but, as he ruefully admitted, that was only because he'd disobeyed Malcolm's first law of Quasar crashing which is **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES LET GO OF THE BARS**. That way you stay tucked inside until the world stops bouncing around, and climb out unscathed.

Malcolm himself survived an end-over-end flip and series of barrel rolls during high speed crashes in early Quasar prototype tests. These machines are tough. Royce Creasey drove a Quasar into a ditch for a Government film crew, did it again when they wanted to see it at higher speed, then rode it home.

Maybe you're thinking that something which looks like a refugee from *Tron*, keeps you warm and dry, handles like a six hundredweight two-wheeler has no right to, and goes like stink is just too much. Why not buy a car?

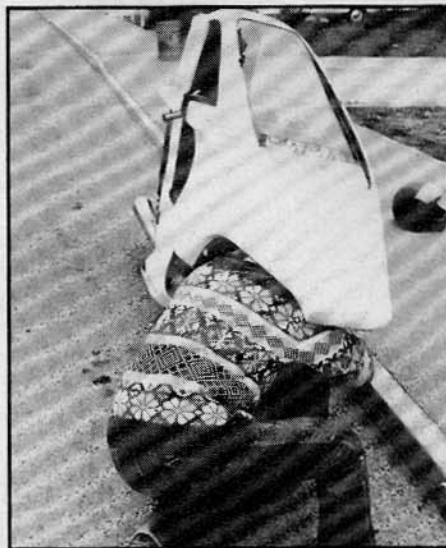
Well, the Thirteen is as unlike a car as it is a conventional motorcycle. The advantages of a car are there all right, but nothing on four wheels is as exhilarating in corners or gobbles up gaps in traffic so fast. Or, Lamborghini Countachs included, gets as much attention.

Fast as I was going after 60 or so miles, I still wouldn't have tried to show a Ninja the way with the Thirteen — but put Malcolm or Royce in it, though, and I'm not so sure. I'm convinced that no standard Z1300

would ever get anywhere near it. Even staying within the Thirteen's rev range the wind pressure would down an unprotected Zed rider in a few miles of open road.

And when I got back to Malcolm's after frightening that Marina clone by turning on the lights, he didn't want to know whether I'd been converted or thrilled to bits, just whether I'd understood.

To Malcolm, you see, the Quasar and the Thirteen might not be everyone's cup of Earl Grey but they have an irrefutable logic of



Jaws meets Moby Dick. The Great White Shark devours its creator prior to wolfing down the world of straightjacketed chassis design thinking

design and function.

Malcolm, Royce and a growing band of FF builders and riders in Bristol and elsewhere aren't trying to change the world or grab every passing motorised bicycle rider in order to ram FF theories down their throat. They're trying to change the essential nature of the two wheelers they ride. While I was riding and enjoying Malcolm's Thirteen, he was thrashing the bollocks off my LC and loving every moment of it. Not a man to let single-minded determination stop him having fun.

The Thirteen is currently on offer at around £4000 and meanwhile Malcolm is pressing ahead with plans to market FF kits. He's building the first few himself, then he'll help buyers build them up (he supplies frame and bodywork; buyer supplies engine, electrics etc). After that he reckons he'll have learned enough to produce a comprehensive instruction booklet for DIY FF-ers.

He admits there are still a few problems to be overcome. One bike he has on the stocks is so low that the front wheel blocks the rider's view ahead, while the ever-present cash flow problems of a limited production set up have encouraged him to look at ways of producing hub centre layouts at less than the £400 they currently go for.

He calls the Thirteen a 'second generation' FF. Over in Bristol Royce reckons he's already into the third (and we'll have more news on that scene when Paul gets back from the Bol in the Quasar). Meantime, if you've got a big mill and aren't sure whether or not to go down Trick Frame Road, why not contact Malcolm first? We'll put you in touch.

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