

How a former dirt bike gave up berms for the clean life on asphalt.

By Dale Boller



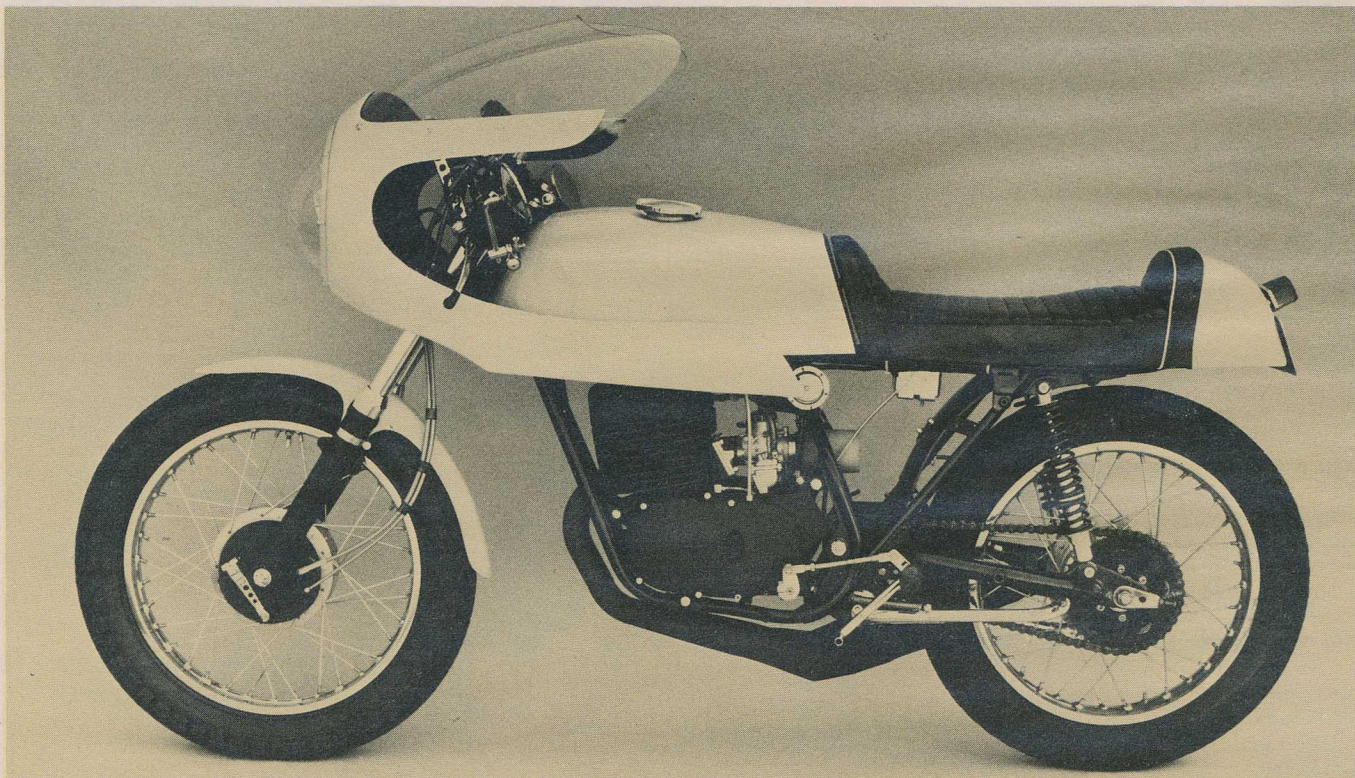
● Bob Sparkman is a horse trader by nature. He has to be. He's only 18 and doesn't have enough money to acquire his bikes with exchanges of hard cash. When he was five, his father taught him to ride and gave him an old 80cc trail bike which became the basis for future bartering. He traded it for something else, which got rebuilt and swapped for something better. Over the years Sparkman bought a few basket cases and learned mechanics while rebuilding them for trade. His wheeling and dealing became so much of an obsession that he now claims to have owned 100 motorcycles—from Yamaha 80s to motocrossers.

This time he wanted something different. One weekend he rode his 500 Triumph from his home in Simi Valley, Calif., to the Rock Store in Southern California's Malibu mountains. On a busy Sunday, anywhere from 75 to 200 street riders converge on the Rock Store to swap café racer stories and be part of the scene. When Sparkman arrived, he spotted a pick-up truck parked near the cluster of bikes. In its bed was a near-new Yamaha 360 Enduro, having been placed there when its owner became disillusioned with the dirt. Sparkman traded the guy straight across for his Triumph.

As the dirt bike sat among all those flashy café racers, Sparkman hit on the idea for something really different. He remembered the Greeves Silverstone and Bultaco TSS, which were genuine road racers powered by two-stroke singles resembling today's enduro engines. Then there were the famous Kawasaki Bighorn 350s which Art Baumann and Yvon du-Hamel rode in the lightweight class a couple of years back. The precedents

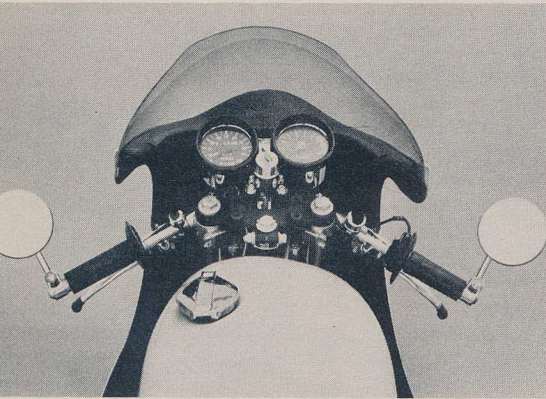
(Continued on page 116)

THE CAFE ENDURO



THE CAFE ENDURO

(Continued from page 110)



Stock instruments look great behind the CB-750 Honda cafe fairing. On the bars Bob even retains the padded leather donuts used by dirt riders.

were there, but no one in the Rock Store crowd had done it yet.

Sparkman worked frantically for two weeks. Discounting its looks, the bike he built is surprisingly stock. A local Yamaha shop ported the barrel and the custom pipe helps top end, but otherwise the engine remains in dirt-bike tune. The wheels, brakes and suspension are stock. Working late into the night, Sparkman stripped the frame bare and welded on new brackets for the all-important rear-set pegs. Rear sprocket gearing dropped from 51 teeth to 39—good for 95 mph. He bought a used 750 Honda tank/seat/fairing combo from a friend and spent several days adapting it to the Yamaha. The same friend sold him a Read-Titan

shift linkage and CB-750 headlight. The racy Rickman fender fit nicely in front, and of course a Preston Petty Big Mudder bolted on in back without so much as a new bracket. Four dollars bought the taillight from Racecrafters. Tommaselli levers and clip-on handlebars were the final road-race touches.

Fifty dollars in chrome, allen-head bolts and spray-can paint sufficed for the cosmetics. By choosing a tasteful combination of dull-black against metal or chrome, Sparkman achieved a richly-styled look for very little money. The yellow fiberglass obviously isn't of coachwork quality, but somehow the concept of the whole bike and its cobby dirt-bike roots don't demand a New York auto show execution and finish. A true custom café racer would never get away with a Preston Petty plastic rear fender. Sparkman's bike is all the more appealing because of it.

But a bike can't be meaningful on concept and funky cosmetics alone. It has to function to be truly valid. *Cycle* has often marvelled at the amazing street suitability of certain enduro bikes in spite of their lumpy tires and dirt geometry. They rarely have a ground clearance problem; they track accurately; they don't wiggle; and in the hands of a competent rider they can give fits to a street bike. We have often wondered what a set of street tires and a bit more power would do for an enduro—and Sparkman has provided an answer. Very simply, his bike will stick with 90 percent of the street machines available today. Naturally a front disc would aid braking and Sparkman's Dunlop K70 tires have to go. But

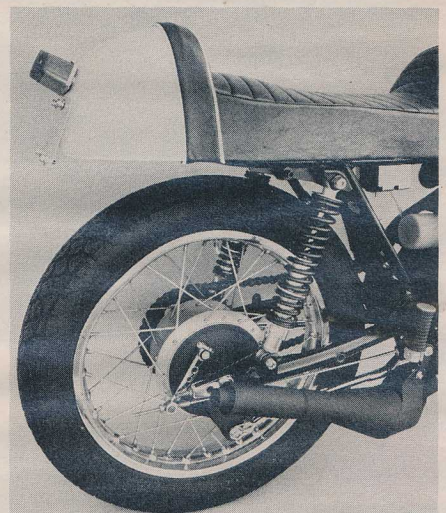
in spite of these improvable areas, the bike does go down a mountain road with impressive speed and remarkable ease.

Still, there is one major flaw which may explain why big-bore two-stroke singles aren't found in street bikes. They vibrate. This bike shakes so bad that Sparkman wears heavy insulated ski gloves to help damp the jackhammer buzz coming through the bars. He says he hardly notices anymore, but if that's true he doesn't notice earthquakes either. Off the road, an enduro engine most often operates at midrange revs where there's plenty of traction-grabbing torque and not much vibration. Speeds average 25–35 mph. On pavement this bike lives at 50–75 mph. The power necessary for these speeds doesn't even arrive until 6000 rpm—and with it comes the shivering shakes. When he saves some money to get the crankshaft rebalanced, things hopefully will smooth out. At least a little bit.

Sparkman has two weeks time, his old Triumph and about \$300 in the Yamaha. When he trades it off, it won't be because the bike can't run with the Rock Store crowd. It won't be because the vibration can't be fixed or at least tolerated. Sparkman is a born pack rat. He carries around one prize until another looms ahead. Then instinctively and without remorse, he drops the old and picks up the new. Next time Sparkman will chop a Jawa or race the desert on an RD-350. His new project will allow him to tinker, build, design and learn—things he has done well in the past. His new bike will again be unique and functional. It will help him be a better rider. After that, there will be something else. ©



PHOTOGRAPHY: DALE BOLLER



A racing pipe with token silencer makes the big single quite loud for the street. At 280 pounds the bike weighs 120 pounds less than a Honda 400.

Bike sometimes cannot resist its 1972 RT2 Enduro heritage. Bob first got hooked on the road-race look when he saw racing Yamahas at Ontario.