

# Fantic 125RC Caballero

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AS THIS STORY indicates, I had been associated with Fantic a long time before publication. In fact, I think I was the first rider to race a Fantic in Britain.

Although it is probably a sign of old age, I cannot quite remember how I came to have the Fantic initially, but I do recall that I was immediately impressed by the quality of the bike. The very first one I rode was very well screwed together, which no doubt influenced me to continue riding the bikes, despite the lack of success in competition.

I was also lucky to have the assistance of an almost full-time mechanic, which in other times would have been a luxury, but in the case of the Fantic proved to be a necessity, since virtually every time we rode the bikes something broke on them.

Part of the problem was the five-speed gearbox. Like all Minarelli engines this was not very clever in its action; neither was it the most robust of designs. I remember once doing some carburation tests on one of the bikes on a long, straight shale road. I was just winding the bike up to peak rpm in third when it gave an asthmatic cough from somewhere in the region of the carburettor accompanied almost immediately by a total seizure.

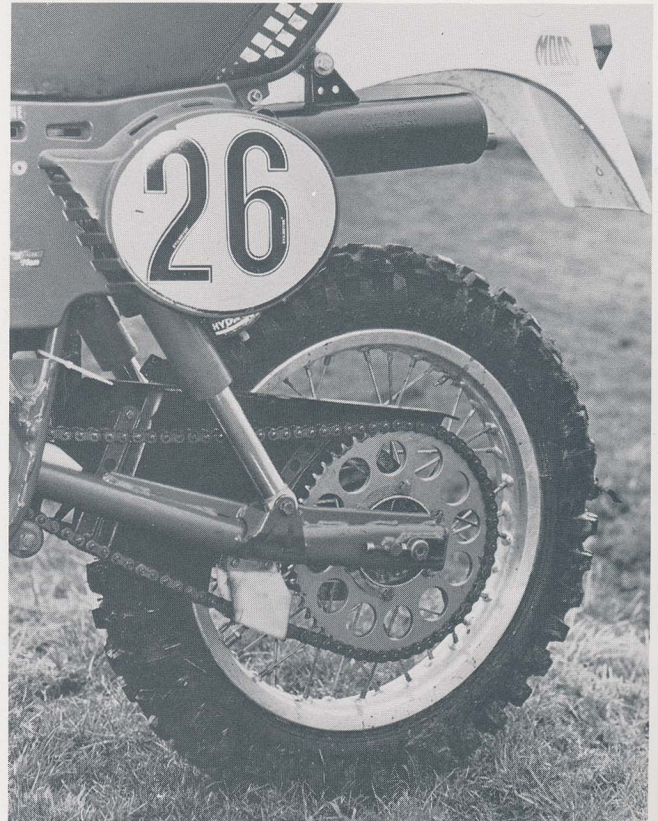
Thinking that the piston had nipped up I whipped in the clutch, but found that the rear wheel did not free. This pointed ominously to the gearbox, and sure enough, when we stripped the motor, we found that the gearbox mainshaft had fractured. In doing so, it had buckled and split the crankcase horizontally – probably the only Minarelli to have a crankcase split both horizontally AND vertically.

The five-speeder also posed other problems.

The motor's relatively narrow power band and the wide-ratio gearbox meant that it had to be revved to the ultimate before engaging the next higher gear. Often the piston would give up the ghost when so abused and would melt – a somewhat frustrating experience for a rider in mid-event.

This happened to me in the Beacons on the only

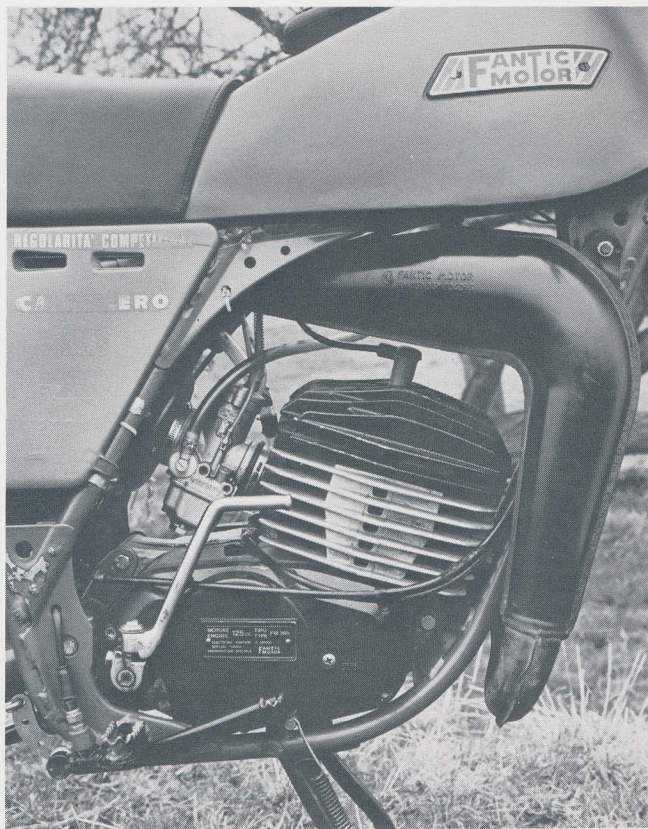
**Fantic, like Jawa, use the Sachs Hydracross rear dampers, which have a well-deserved reputation for reliability.**



occasion I ever enjoyed myself in this event. For some reason I was really motoring, despite the standard snow, mud and chopped branches. I remember passing a string of riders down a large, winding green lane to a stream crossing, blasting through the stream in grand style and then experiencing the dreaded 'whump!' as the piston vaporized.

A fine afternoon was finished off by having to bribe a wild Welshman to tow me back to the *parc fermé* with his BSA B50MX, probably the only bike in existence which is capable of hauling itself and its own weight again, up a 1 in 2 rock-strewn, muddy bank.

Nevertheless, I still hold fine memories of the **Fantic and Minarelli have a very long-standing relationship. This latest 125 Minarelli engine, despite its lack of reed or disc valve, is the best yet, but is still hindered by a poor gearbox.**



Fantics if only for the fact that they provided me with my first medal in the Welsh Two Day, and any bike which can do that can be forgiven almost everything.

Riding the latest offering from Fantic was something of a nostalgic trip. In the mid-1970s I had two very happy years aboard these beautiful little bikes when riding for Eddie Crooks, and despite the fact that 125s were not much in vogue at the time, I usually got in the medals.

Although the latest Fantics are very different beasts from the ones I rode, they still retain certain family traits. They remain the best-

**It is amazing how quickly highly prized components become dated. The Marzocchi forks fitted to the Fantic were the ultimate at one time, but have long been superseded by their air-assisted brothers from the same factory, and a host of equally good units.**





**Alan Brick, who had so much success on the Fantic 50, on board the 125cc big brother in the 1978 Beacons Enduro.**

finished racing motorcycles on general sale and the attention to detail is still as meticulous as ever. Equally, they are just as hard work to ride as they ever were.

The present Caballero RC has a chassis which is almost a piece of sculpture, so elegant is its form. A full duplex frame wraps round the six-speed power plant in a smooth, effortless sweep. The frame is somewhat over-engineered for a mere 125, as witnessed by the fact that a 250cc Hiro engine has been shoehorned into the same frame without any problems.

Gussetting is heavily used at the steering head and around the swinging arm pivot. The swinging arm itself is a very nicely executed piece of work, beginning with round tubing and gradually changing section until it is oval at the rear wheel. Like the frame it is radically over-engineered and would probably handle twice the power of the 125 with no complaint.

Although the paint finish is not of critical importance on a racing bike mention should be made of the Fantic's livery, since it is of exceptional quality. The paint is powdered enamel, which is baked on to the frame and becomes almost indestructible. Our test bike had been well used and yet there was scarcely a scratch on it.

Fantic's obsession with neatness can have its drawbacks. All the cables are routed behind the front number plate and this leads to excessively heavy front brake and clutch action. Giving them a freer run would mean a somewhat less tidy appearance but would result in better action.

In addition to their own frame the company employ some excellent proprietary parts. The front forks are by Marzocchi and, despite the lack of air-assistance, these work very well. They are no longer the pinnacle of excellence which they once were, but they are still of an acceptable quality for a serious racing machine.

The rear dampers are much more interesting.

These units are the Sachs Hydracross, which dispense with springs entirely and rely on air as a springing medium. Effective air dampers are notoriously difficult to produce, but Sachs seem to have solved the problem with these units, which give an excellent action throughout their range. They also enjoy an unrivalled reputation for both reliability and longevity.

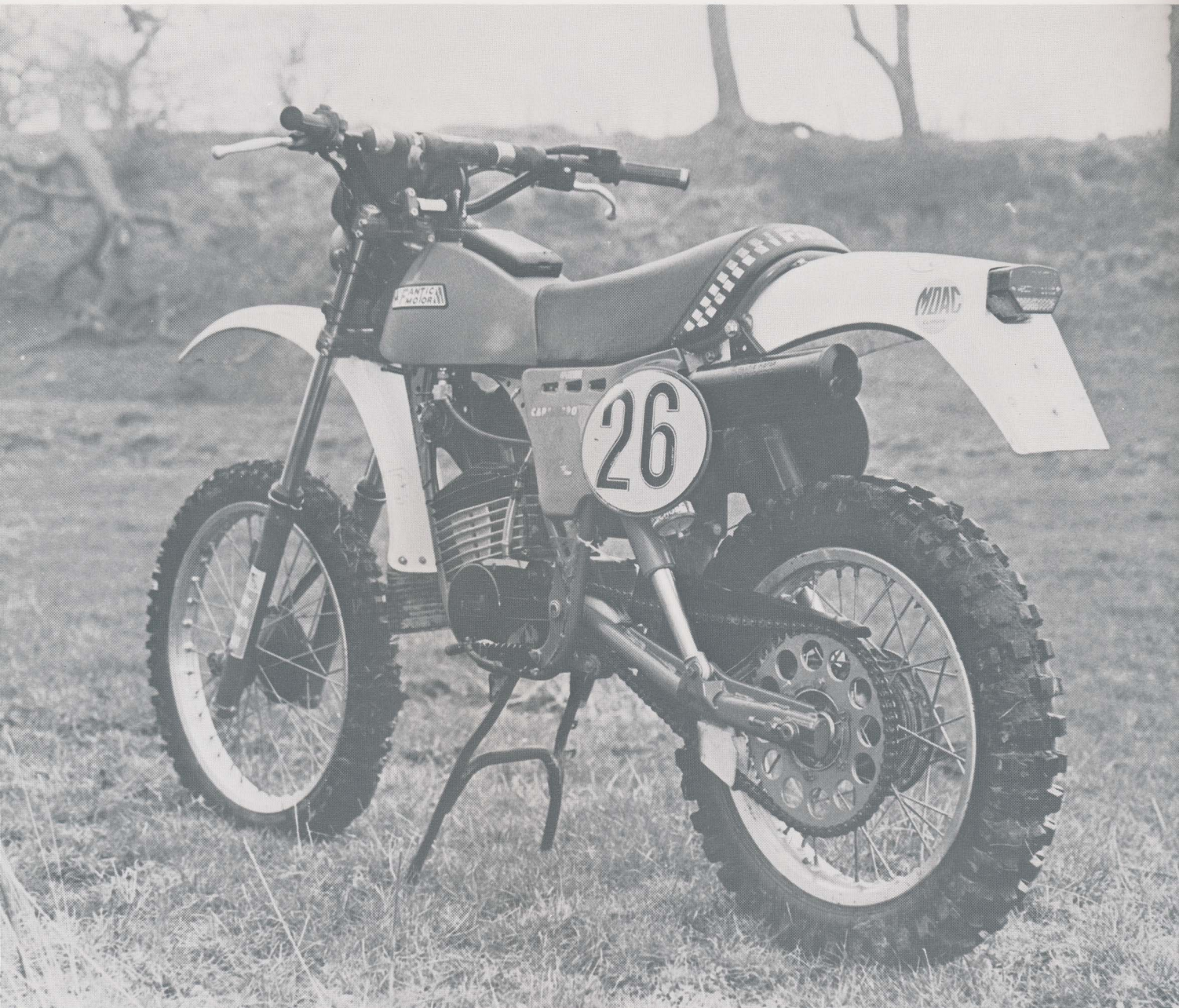
Front and rear brakes are, almost inevitably, Grimeca. On our test bike they were not brilliant in performance, but I put this down to the hard life the bike had led and the poor run of the front brake cable. These brakes are standard wear for literally dozens of marques and are usually very good.

The power plant is a joint venture by Fantic and Minarelli. The seven-port barrel uses only piston port induction without the assistance of a reed valve, but it is still a very lively motor with a commendably wide spread of power. This is reflected by a torque peak at only 8750rpm – very low for a racing 125 – and is possibly a result of the comparatively small 32mm carburettor used on the motor. Claimed peak power is 26bhp at 10,500rpm and this feels about right. Certainly the Fantic is well competitive against anything in its class.

Whilst the power is very acceptable, the gearbox is not. The Minarelli gearbox has never been the world's slickest and this latest six-speeder does nothing to improve matters. The change is heavy and there seems to be an ample selection of false neutrals. On a big bike this would be an irritation, but on a 125, where gear changes seem to happen a dozen times per minute, it is a distinct disadvantage.

To be honest, I prejudged the Fantic before I even rode it – and I was right! Every bike of this marque I have encountered has handled well and this one was no exception. It was very stable over the rough and the weight distribution was just about ideal. The front wheel could be picked up at will, which is vital on a 125, where one simply has to press on regardless or risk the motor dropping off its power curve.

It was particularly good on fast, smooth corners,



**The little Fantics have always been personal favourites of the author, if only for their beautiful finish and workmanship.**

where the way it could be drifted in a full-blooded power slide belied its diminutive capacity. Whilst going quickly was both easy and fun, going more slowly was difficult. Even for such a small motor the Fantic seemed to have very light flywheels, and the instant the rpm dropped, the motor stopped dead. With a lack of primary kickstarting, this trait could become a nuisance in an event. Vernon Leigh Motorcycles, who supplied and prepared our test bike, normally run two teeth lower than standard on the rear wheel simply to give their riders every chance of keeping the motor well on the boil.

Unquestionably the RC does give a brave and strong rider the opportunity to go very quickly, and driven flat out it is a very pleasant motorcycle. However, it does not like to be ridden at anything less than full bore and it really needs a young rider who is willing to disconnect his brain before an event in order to get the best out of it. For my taste, it is too much like hard work!

At £1349 the Fantic may seem a little expensive, but it is one of the most complete packages on sale today. Every item on the bike from paint to tyres is of the highest quality and needs literally

nothing doing to it before one could enter it in a two-day National. This completeness, together with its speed and handling, must make it an attractive proposition for the 125cc head banger's class in the British Championship.

**Fantic Caballero 125RC**

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke, with piston-port induction

Capacity: 124cc (55.2 × 52mm)

Compression ratio: 14:1

Carburation: 32mm Dell'Orto with enrichening circuit for cold starting, breathing through oil-soaked foam filter

Claimed maximum power: 26bhp at 10,500rpm

Lubrication: PJ1 Goldfire at 40:1

Transmission: Primary drive by gears to six-speed gearbox. Wet clutch

Electrical equipment: 55-watt Motoplat generator with pointless ignition and 6-volt DC lighting

Fuel capacity: 8 litres (1.75 imp gal) (including reserve)

Suspension: Marzocchi leading axle front forks giving 10in of travel.

Twin damper swinging arm controlled by Sachs Hydracross units giving 11in of travel at the rear wheel

Frame: Full duplex

Tyres: 3.00 × 21in front; 4.50 × 18in rear, both Metzeler motocross/enduro

Brakes: 6in sls by Grimeca front and rear. Both q.d.

Wheelbase: 58in

Ground clearance: 12in

Saddle height: 35in

Claimed dry weight: 209lb