

Restoring an old master

Deryk Wylde explains how to set about rebuilding classic British competition machines.

"After" — Ken Odlin's 1953 AJS, taken just after he had completed the major work.



Left: "Before" — as found with wrong oil tank, exhaust and odd gussets welded on the frame. But all the essentials are there, just waiting for restoration.

WHAT may seem to be totally obvious, the restoration of a classic British pre-65 trials or scrambles machine ready for use in competition starts in the workshop!

Silly as it may seem that is the one area of restoration that often eludes the tyro but I have never seen a successful restoration project emerge from a workshop that could be categorised as 'scruffy'. So, first things first, start on your work area and restore that before you introduce the bike into the equation.

My own preference is for a clean, well-lit and well-organised area for two reasons. Firstly a lot of the restoration work involves paint surfaces and mechanical reassembly work that demands totally clean working conditions and, secondly, the machine may well sit in the work area in bits for long periods whilst you track down that elusive spare — and in untidy conditions all the bits have a tendency to damage or lose themselves . . .

I always clean my machines thoroughly before I ever take them near the workshop and my standard procedure is to



Essential tools. You start down the restoration road when you mash your last nut. . .

thoroughly spray with Gunk and to poke a stiff paint brush into all the crevices. Then it's a thorough cleaning with the hose pipe, wiping off excess water and finishing with a spray of Contact 'Duck Oil', which chases off the water, lubricates the working surfaces and leaves a protective film on all the alloy, etc.

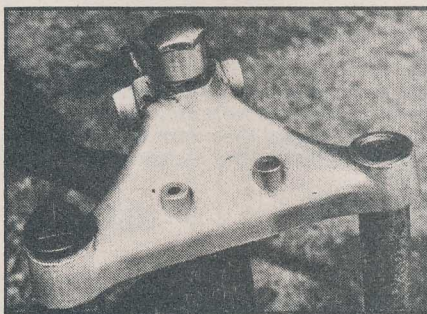
That way I also keep my tools clean — there is nothing more frustrating than to

Right: The Ajay today. Alloy refinished by taking out the major dints with emery cloth, back to flat, but scratched, alloy. Take out the scratches with 420 grit wet or dry paper followed by 600 grit used wet. Finish with ordinary wire wool from the local hardware shop and then polish with Solvol Autosol — the "only" alloy polish! The nuts filed back to bare metal and carefully hand polished before rechroming. Note that rechroming adds a thin protective film to the surface — it should look like chrome before you hand it to the chromer if you want a superb finish.



Above: On any Sunday afternoon — using the bike in a classic trial. There are events throughout the country on every weekend except Remembrance Sunday.

Left: One of my Ajays as I bought it, alloy pitted and discoloured, fork top nuts rusted and the wrong fork crown nut for the year.

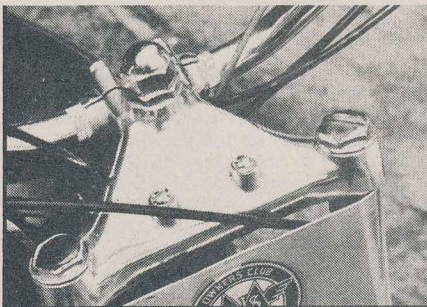


scratch a freshly rechromed nut with some grit in your spanner the first time you tighten it . . .

Equally I always use the correct size spanner for the job. My preference is for a selection of Whitworth square drive sockets, including the large sizes for fork top, rear axle and clutch centre nuts. I also have a full selection of combination spanners and ring spanners for those awkward to reach nuts and bolts.

A full selection of screwdrivers are high on my list, with blades that correctly fit every type of screw on the bike. You start down the road to becoming a restorer when you mangle your last nut or screw.

Other than well-fitting, good quality, standard workshop tools, the other equipment needed is really a personal question



of choice, capability and expense. I do my own welding and brazing but I always give my turning and milling work to friends or known engineers. There are plenty of small engineering companies ready to help with such work plus stove enamelling, chroming, etc.

Having organised your workshop you are already to start your restoration project. I always assess which parts of the job are likely to take the most time when planning my activities around it. That way if you start with that longest task and then the next longest while that is under way you should end up with all the work coming together at the end and the bike being reassembled and ridden.

I suppose it is human nature but I know where there are several machines that have been dismantled for years just because the work load was not planned and jobs just seemed to drag on until the owner finally lost interest and gave up.

Whatever your choice of machine there are usually sources of the necessary spares available but this is another source of potential frustration. The machine restoration 'industry' is attracting some unsavoury characters selling pattern spares that are virtually useless.

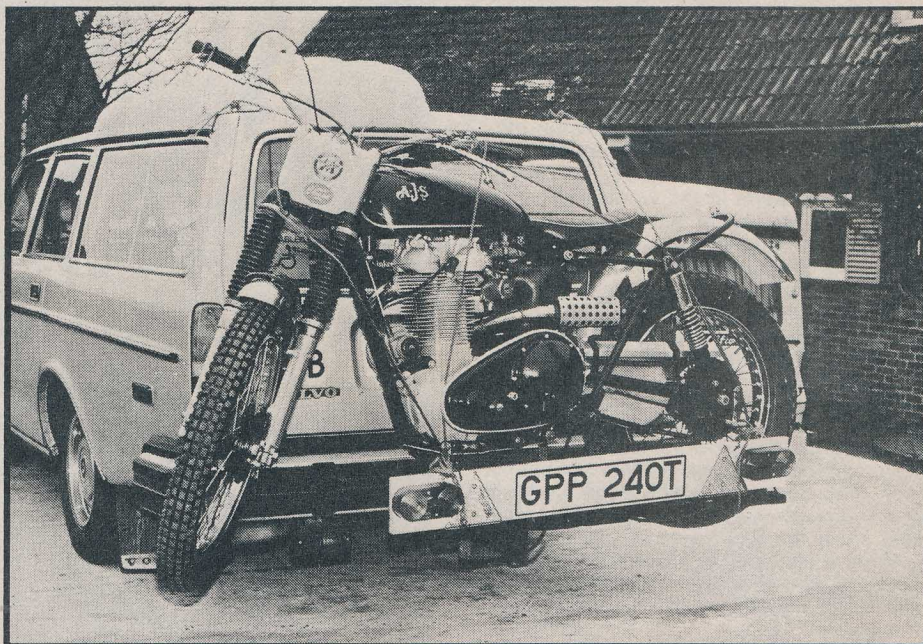
Typical are some exhaust systems that I have seen that look very presentably chromed until you fit them and start the engine whereupon they discolour and within days are showing rust pimpling through. My only recommendation is that you get advice from someone who has tried a supplier before you part with your money. Most certainly don't be fooled by the advertising. Sometimes the companies most eager to advertise are those who can least rely on personal recommendations

If you don't know anyone who can advise you, scan *Trials and Motocross News* which has details of most of the pre-65 trials and scrambles and go along and talk to the riders. I'm certain that you will get a helpful and friendly response because that is the type of rider that pre-65 events attract.

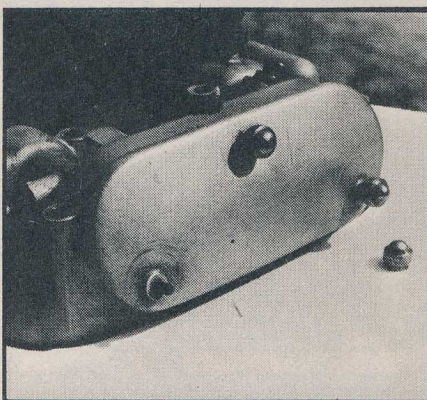
As well as suppliers of genuine or pattern spares there are one make specialists actually restoring or manufacturing complete machines, often selling frames and the like separately. Again seek advice before you jump — there is one frame-maker producing expensive kits which don't line up the engine mounting holes between crankcase and frame!

Amongst the reputable suppliers whose products I can recommend are Peter Pykett (Tel: 026-471 620) who makes superb replica *AJS* trials machines; Allan Clift (Tel: 0872-74716) who makes a replica of the Scott Ellis works *BSA C15T*-special, which he calls an Otter; Mick Lakin (Tel: 03316 2275) who makes a replica of the last works *Tiger Cubs*, plus many bits and pieces for the *Cub* range.

The most popular machines amongst the pre-65 classic bikes are the *AJS* and *Matchless* products, if numbers are anything to go by. Anyone contemplating working on



On any Sunday morning — my own AJS on the bike rack ready to set out to a trial.



The head and rocker cover on the Ajay in the picture on page 89 as it returned from bead blasting. There is only hand polishing with emery and then wire wool between the two shots of the rocker cover!

one of them should most certainly join the Owners Club, details from Billy Ham (Tel: 03447 2271). Spares are available from Happy Hamrax (Tel: 01-969 5380 and ask for 'Chopper') or Russell Motors — talk to Les Myers on 01-228 1714.

Anyone hunting for a 4.00 x 19 in trials tyre for a classic bike should try Watling Tyres on 01-852 3066 — and one of the best suppliers of competition exhausts is Unity Equipe (Tel: 0706 32237).

Anyone wanting advice on matters concerning pre-65 competition bikes is welcome to call me on 043-871 4691 and if you have been bitten by the restoration bug and would like a reference 'bible' then I can strongly recommend Jeff Clew's book, "The Restoration of Vintage and Thoroughbred Motorcycles," published by Haynes.

Tell us about your trip

BEEN abroad on the bike this year? Or are you preparing right now for an autumn touring holiday on the Continent? If so, share your experiences with *MCM* readers — and earn some money in the process!

Tell us about your touring holiday abroad this year in a 500-word article, preferably illustrated with a selection of black and white pictures (plus good colour

transparencies if available), and we will pay £20 for every article published in the magazine. Points to mention include machine performance, route taken, cost and useful tips for other bikers contemplating doing a similar run in '81.

Send them to 'Foreign Touring', *Motorcycle Mechanics*, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough PE3 8DZ.