

REBIRTH OF THE BANTAM

From Zschopau to Small Heath – and back

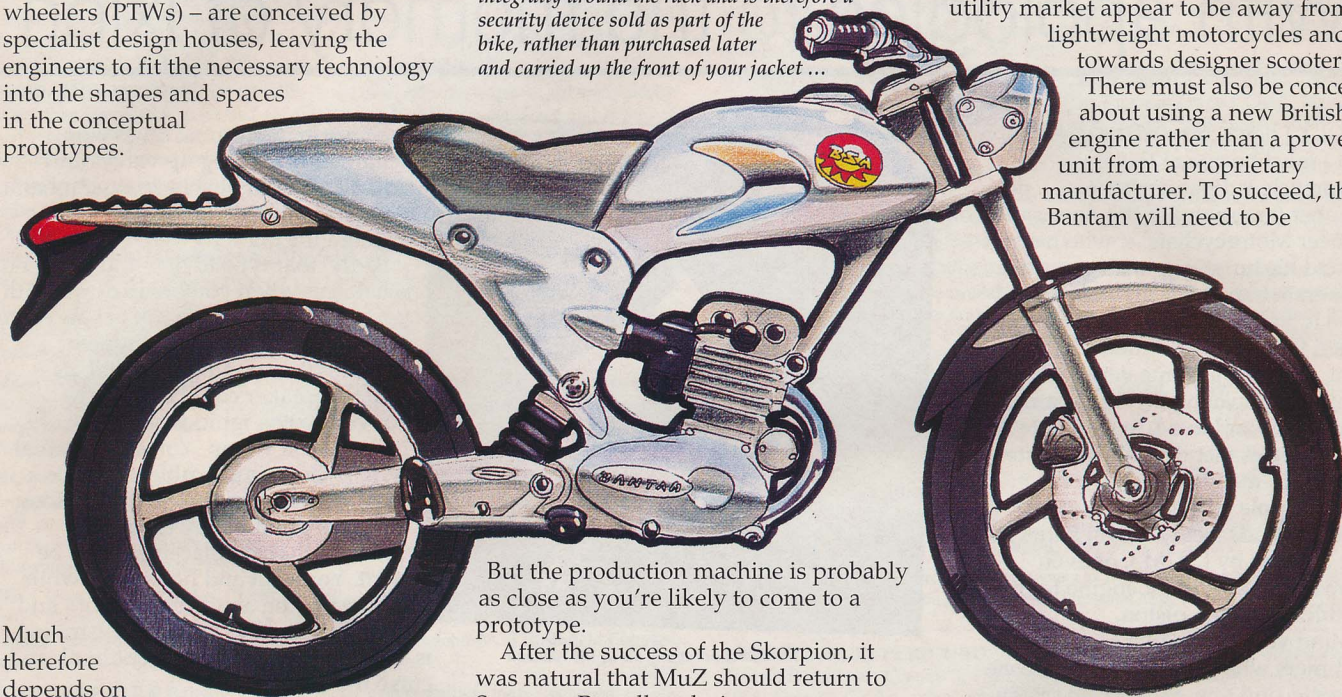


IT'S hard to equate the design talents of Richard Powell with the originality of Edward Turner or Val Page. How the world has changed! Modern products – whether food-mixers or powered two-wheelers (PTWs) – are conceived by specialist design houses, leaving the engineers to fit the necessary technology into the shapes and spaces in the conceptual prototypes.

Rear pillion 'seat hump' removed to expose the extended rack. This features gives a continuous storage space much greater than found on larger machines, by utilising normally 'dead' space when the bike is ridden solo. The 'U' lock fits integrally around the rack and is therefore a security device sold as part of the bike, rather than purchased later and carried up the front of your jacket ...

When the Bantam will reach the market place, and in exactly what form, is still unclear; and one can't help but wonder if the design brief was correct. Current trends in the commuter and utility market appear to be away from lightweight motorcycles and towards designer scooters.

There must also be concern about using a new British engine rather than a proven unit from a proprietary manufacturer. To succeed, the Bantam will need to be



Much therefore depends on the designers' brief and their ability to understand the technicalities of the hardware and the demands and trends of the market plate it's launched into. Not easy with bikes unless you ride them – as they do at Seymour Powell in West London.

It was here that the stunning prototypes of the MuZ Skorpion (amongst others) first saw light of day. The production version (test report elsewhere in this issue) differs in that the tubular steel spars of the frame are bolted together, rather than glued, and the 600 Rotax motor has given way to a more powerful 660 Yamaha lump. Some say the integrity of the design has been spoiled by the 660's radiator and minor alterations to the lines.

But the production machine is probably as close as you're likely to come to a prototype.

After the success of the Skorpion, it was natural that MuZ should return to Seymour Powell to design a new Bantam, when md Peter Kouros acquired the sales rights for the BSA name on new bikes under 200cc. Just before Christmas an hour-long television documentary on Seymour Powell followed the design process for a food mixer, a scooter for Suzuki India and the new MuZ-inspired Bantam. According to Richard Seymour, "The Bantam is traditionally a very simple, lightweight motorcycle which is perfect for short-range commuting. The key is to combine the flavour and utility of the old classic with the latest technology".

At the heart of the new Bantam is a British-designed four-stroke engine which is strong enough to replace part of the chassis. Features include an innovative rack arrangement and a built-in security system, and the target selling price is £2,000.

Modern version of an old (and now mainly lost) idea; a chain guard. Pressed metal cover doubles the life of a chain and almost negates requirement for what would in winter be weekly maintenance to keep the chain clean and lubricated

produced on a high-volume, low-cost basis. The transition from Mk1 prototype (main picture) to production version will be more difficult for Peter Kouros, who can't magic his way from Zschopau to London quite as easily as Turner and Page could walk from machine shop to designer's office.

There is no doubting Seymour Powell's award-winning design skills. Nor any concerns about MuZ's abilities or the tremendous value of the BSA name. But have they got the Bantam right? Please let us know what you think.

Whatever happens, it is only right and proper that Bantam production should move to the site of the old Das Kleine Wunder factory where the original engine was designed before coming to Small Heath as part of Second World War reparations.

"Rider's eye view"

