Enfield India 350

Madras Bullet: A shot in the dark?

THE ENFIELD INDIA was already struggling to pass the big green artic as it was, battling into a stiff headwind on the southbound M1. Then, just as I got level with the cab, the Bullet went bang, my heart sank to my wellies and my stomach jumped at my throat.

Holding the clutch with my left hand and gesturing frantically to the lorry driver with my right, the suddenly-silent Bullet coasted past the squealing and hissing lorry, and I chopped across his path onto the hard shoulder. The bike rolled to a halt, the traffic thundered on oblivious, and to add insult to injury, the rain started to fall.

This was the way it was with the Enfield. In place of the confident simplicity of modern motorcycles that require no more than the twist of a key and stab of a button to get from A to B and back again, the Bullet reintroduced adventure to bike riding.

The snapped exhaust rocker which caused the motorway drama was not the first problem we had with the Enfield. The

Photos: Rod Sloane
Report: Bob Goddard

ROAD TEST

The car is a 1929 Rolls-Royce Phantom 2 with Sedance de Ville body, supplied by P. J. Evans, Monaco House, Bristol Street, Birmingham.

ROAD TEST

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bike was hardly out of cursing distance of importers Slater Brothers of Birmingham when it stopped with ignition trouble, which was eventually traced to a useless ignition switch and rectified by twisting the relevant wires together. According to Slaters, at least eight exhaust rockers have snapped since the Indian Enfields have been imported due to incorrect heat-treatment at the factory, and quite a number of ignition switches have also had to be replaced.

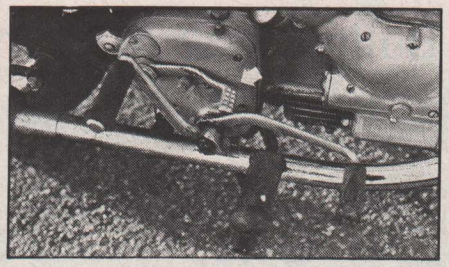
If it is any consolation to prospective Enfield Indian owners, jury-rigging the ignition and charging circuit is easy enough, when you've discovered which wire does what, and the rocker can be replaced in ten minutes flat — provided you have a spare one in your pocket of course. If you don't have a spare rocker, then it is imperative that you break down between Toddington Services and the Luton turn off on the M1. It is along this stretch of motorway that you stand most chance of being rescued as I was by Bedfordshire's number one Enfield enthusiast.

Steven Linsdell not only rushed off home to fetch his van to collect me and the bike, but then took me back to his workshop where he supplied a replacement rocker shaft from his collection of R.E. spares, and fitted it within minutes. Steve races an Enfield Bullet in vintage events, and he also owns a prototype 800cc R.E. twin which never got into production. I nominate him as the Good Samaritan Of The Month, and hereafter subscribe to the Small Worlds theory.

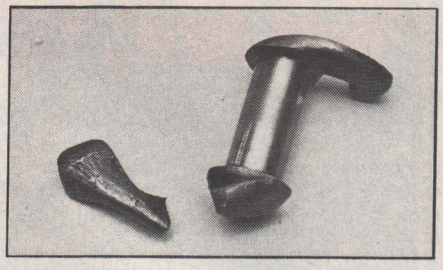
Impressed with the turn fate had taken I set off home a happy road tester, but the Enfield had one last trick up its sleeve. Over the mellow rumble of the Bullet's exhaust and my carefree whistling, clattered the sound of something nasty. I glanced over my shoulder to see the remains of the tool kit bouncing up the road and into the tall grass of the verge. The toolbox had come undone. That was the way it was with the Enfield. The first time I took a passenger we discovered that one of the pillion footrests was missing, I can only conclude that it fell off more quietly than the toolkit.

Yet, for all its faults, the Enfield was good fun to ride. Its soothing exhaust and unhurried performance induced an inner calm, and reminded me of the bikes I used to ride years ago. Acceleration and top speed are about on a par with the Tiger Cub, but the engine revs slower and is almost entirely vibration-free, resulting in a very relaxing ride.

Top speed was around 70 mph depending on conditions, and acceleration roughly matched an average family saloon car, a CZ250 or Honda 125. The four gears seemed very widely spaced after Japanese five or six-geared roadsters, with an especially big jump from third to fourth, but the Bullet's torque overcame this admirably. Allowing the motor to thump majestically in top through towns somehow satisfied the soul, and turned many ageing heads in recognition. On the open road top gear became the equivalent of automatic, and bendy country lanes were all the more fun for not having to constantly stir up the gearbox.

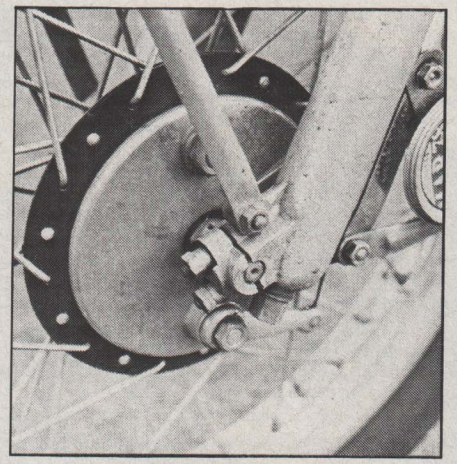


Neutral selector (arrowed) knocks the motor instantly out of second, third or fourth gears.



Faulty hardening was blamed for the rocker breakage which has troubled several Indian Enfields.

Special linings from Finex of India make the tiny sls brake quite adequate.



The Enfield steered and cornered impeccably, with the low-slung footrests and brake pedal grounding long before the bike reached its limit of safety. The steering was light, needing only a touch on the flattish bars to flick it into roundabouts, but the suspension came as a shock on the first stretch of bumpy road. The front forks jarred my arms, and the near-solid rear shocks shot me out of the seat. I can't imagine that Indian roads are smoother than ours, so presumably Armstrong India who make the shocks consider their local riders have a hardier constitution.

Fuel consumption averaged 62 mpg which was disappointing considering the tiny one inch carburettor fitted, but owners prepared to plod around at 50 mph would easily improve on this figure. I understand that the same carb is fitted to the 175cc Enfield India not imported here, and both bikes suffer for the compromise.

The motor had a tendency to spit back through the carb at low revs and would not pick up cleanly from tickover when the throttle was cracked open, despite much pilot air screw twiddling. If I owned the bike I would be tempted to fit an Amal Concentric which would improve economy as well as performance. The 3¼ gallon petrol tank ensures a good cruising range.

Affectionately labelled Royal Oilfield or Oiler for short when the Bullet was made at Redditch, I expected the bike to be a liberal lubricator of my garage floor but the bike had done 400 miles before the first drop appeared. A check on the sump-mounted oil tank showed that the motor had used about a pint which, as any Enfield owner will tell you, is very respectable.

When I first saw the size of the tiny half-width hub, single leading shoe front brake I guessed the only thing it would stop was my heartbeat, but I was wrong. Thanks to some demon liners from Finex of India, the Enfield had adequate stopping power to cope with its performance. The rear brake, operated by an immense lever giving a 4:1 magnification of toe power, locked the back

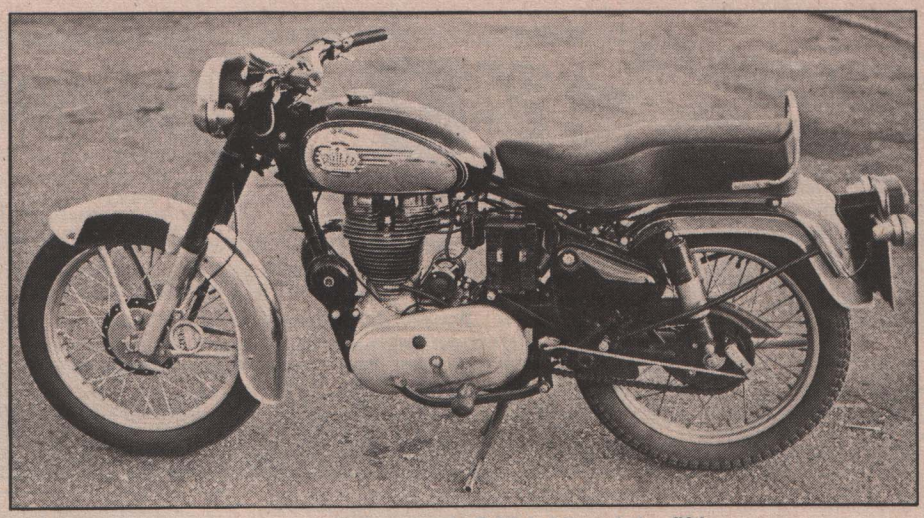
wheel easily, yet could be controlled with care.

The riding position, with lowish bars and forward footrests, was more comfortable than it sounds, but I didn't like the seat. It tapered towards the tank and sloped forward slightly, so that every few miles I would find myself sitting on an uncomfortably hard and narrow piece and have to shift back yet again. The pillion passenger approved of the grab rail.

Starting was simple requiring only three or four swings on the non-folding lever to wake the motor up. The handlebar mounted choke lever could be backed off within a few hundred yards. Apart from the initial difficulty with the ignition switch, the bike's electrics behaved well, although I couldn't get used to the peculiar indicator stalk.

The headlamp nacelle housed two amusing little sidelights, either side of the kilometer-calibrated speedo which had a tendency to go berserk when the revs reached their zenith. The 6 volt 30/24 watt headlamp produced the sort of feeble glow you'd expect from a 6 volt 30/24 watt headlamp, and it was prudent to follow cars at night.

An ammeter provided early warning of any electrical deficiency — except at night when trouble was most likely to occur, as there was no illuminating bulb. There was no repeater lamp to show that the indicators were working, and nothing to warn the rider that main beam had been put into operation — a serious oversight considering that it was impossible to tell from the light dripping weakly onto the tarmac in front of the mudguard. Neither was there a neutral indicator light, but instead the Bullet sported a third foot lever on the right hand side of the engine which magically selected neutral from second, third and fourth gears when stamped upon. The hooter was more likely to make pedestrians burst into laughter than jump out of the way.



The Enfield India looks every bit the stately British bike of the fifties.

Deeply valanced chrome mudguards front and rear helped to keep the bike fairly clean in the messy November weather of the test. The black sides of the front fender are for the front registration number, still required in India. Chromework on the levers and around the handlebar area showed large areas of nickel base plating, but in contrast, the paintwork was of good quality.

Keeping true to almost forgotten British traditions, the Indians apply a layer of red oxide primer before the classical black and cream lined topcoat is stoved on. High quality tools are kept in a tool roll in the right hand side cover, and the opposite side box has room for extra tools and rockers, in addition to housing the stop lamp switch.

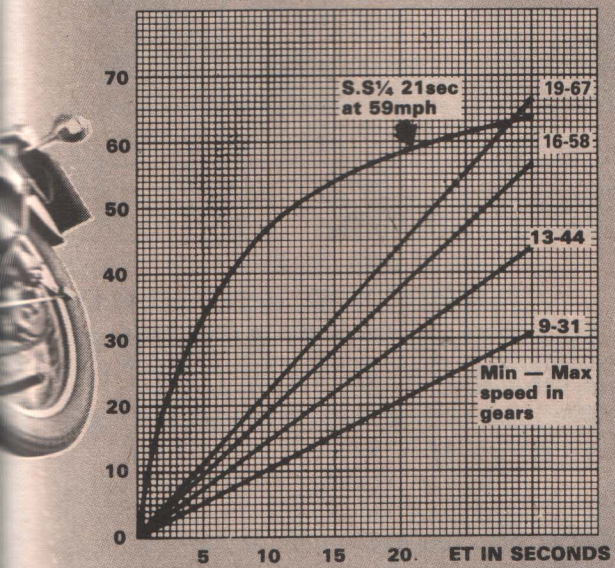
We would like to have brought you our usual dynamometer test on the Enfield but the rear number plate, rear lamp and rear indicators fell off somewhere on the road near our test track in Surrey and we couldn't get the bike back in time for dyno testing. That was the way it was with the Enfield.

Taken on the whole, the Enfield is a solid piece of workmanship, spoiled only by a couple of items — the rocker and ignition switch — which detract from the reliable and dependable image inherited from the Royal Enfield singles of time gone by. But who is going to pay £711 for a replica of a motorcycle that is at least 20 years out of date? Nostalgia freaks will get a kick out of the thump of the exhaust note, and more elderly bikers returning to two wheels after many years' absence may feel more at home. But for my money a CG125 Honda offers almost equal performance, much better fuel mileage and infinitely superior long term practicability for half the price. The Enfield is a nice enough motorcycle, but it really should be in a museum.

Performance & specification

TRACK CONDITIONS

Cold and blustery. 20mph quarter headwind, ambient temperature 41 deg F.



PERFORMANCE

Max speed 66.5mph
ss¼mile ..... 21sec at 59mph
braking from 30mph 33ft
fuel consumption:
best 69mpg
worst 57mpg
average over test 62mpg
speedo error (calibrated in kph) ..... 3mph fast at 60mph

ENGINE

Air cooled, single cylinder, overhead valve four stroke, 1in S25/B carburettor, cb and coil. Dry sump lubrication with oil tank integral with crankcase. 100 watt alternator, 6v 11ah battery.
displacement 346cc
bore x stroke ..... 70 x 90mm
compression ratio 6.5:1

TRANSMISSION

Duplex chain primary drive to four speed gearbox via wet multi-plate clutch. Final drive by chain.
Overall gearbox ratios 5.32:1, 7.2:1, 9.8:1, 14.8:1

CHASSIS

Single leading shoe drum brakes front and rear.

HOW IT COMPARES

Model	Price inc. VAT/delivery £	Speed	Average mpg	ss¼ mile	Dry weight lbs
Enfield India 350	711.00	67	62	21.0	359
Kawasaki KH400	798.50	101	34	15.2	364
Suzuki GS400	802.00	96	51	15.8	379
CZ 250 Custom	426.00	72	54	19.0	313
Honda CG125	358.00	67	106	20.0	209

front tyre ..... 3.25 x 19 Indian Dunlop
rear tyre ..... 3.25 x 19 Indian Dunlop
wheelbase 54ins
overall length 88ins
overall width 29ins
dry weight 359lbs
fuel tank 3.3gal

PARTS PRICES INC VAT

front mudguard £14.95
handlebar £2.65
speedo cable £2.16
cb points £1.81
exhaust system complete £15.49
set of piston and rings £15.85
list price £711
Warranty: six months/6,000 miles parts and labour.
Importer: Slater Brothers, Collington, Nr Bromyard, Herefordshire.