

# Golden Oldies

Five manufacturers dominated the large-capacity bike market from the end of the war until the end of the U.K. industry. BSA, Triumph, Ariel, Norton and AJS/Matchless. They eventually split into two camps with Norton/AMC representing the latter two and, finally, absorbing the first three as well. In the 'fifties competition was fierce and whatever one did, chances were the other would soon follow suit — rather like the situation with the Japanese manufacturers today. So when the trend to increase the 500cc twins to 600 began, most soon followed with a second stage to up it to 650 (although to be fair BSA/Triumph had long campaigned the 650 class).

The Matchless G12 started life in the very early 'fifties as the 500cc G9, which was in itself a road-going version of the rather nice G45 racer. Racers in those days were usually offered in some form of road going trim as well. The G9 is perhaps considered to be the best of the AMC twins for big twins rarely improve as they get bigger. The general public thought

The last of the twins from Matchless was rugged and reliable. Bruce Preston checks out a 'one owner' example. Photography by Philip Sayer



differently, though, and the continuing success of the BSA Gold Flash, Triumph Tiger 110 and the Dominator 99 resulted in the Matchless, a conventional pushrod-operated vertical twin, being given a boost to 600ccs. This was the G11. By the late 'fifties, there was a growing demand for even more power and although Matchless claimed that their G11 was the first production road bike to put 100 miles into an hour (with Vic Willoughby aboard), the pressure was on them for even more power; the G12 was introduced, having a capacity of 650cc. A sports version was also offered, the CSR (Competition Sports Racer)

but called by the opposition the Coffee Shop Racer (yes, the coffee shop was the 'in' place then). It was the last of the vertical twins to be made by Matchless, although they did later introduce the G15, a 750 version with a Norton Atlas engine. That doesn't really count.

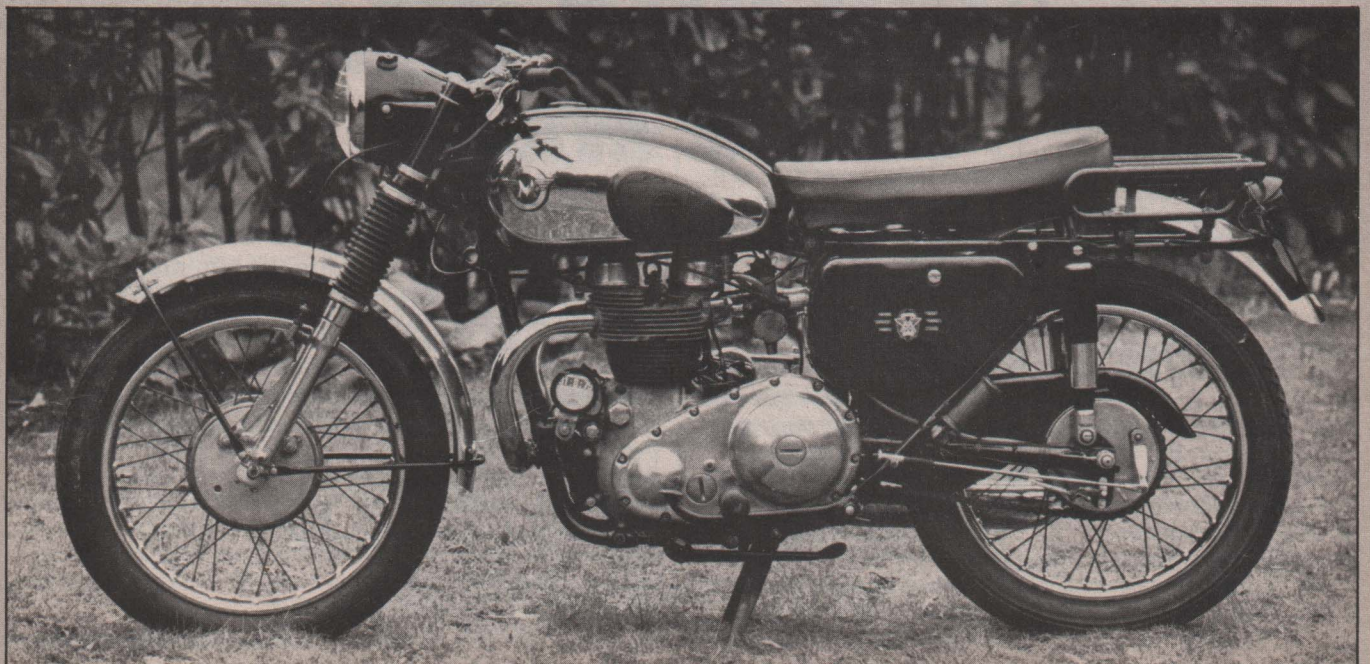
Matchless were always the rugged, reliable ones and their twins fell readily into this pattern. The looked chunky, especially the original 500cc with that handsome megaphone type silencer. They came in black with a beautiful deep red and chrome tank and, to the enthusiast there was no possibility of confusing the Matchbox with any other make —

it was quite distinctive in both sound and shape but without stepping over the accepted lines of convention. In fact, it would be fair to say the offerings of Associated Motor Cycles rarely offered any startling technical innovation. Just good solid British engineering well finished and put together.

## PETE GOSDEN'S G12 CSR

Pete is absolutely right for a Matchless owner, solid and reliable. But it is open to debate whether his bike made him like that or whether he was always like it — he has certainly been like it for the many years that I have known him! He bought the G12 new in 1961. The Japanese invasion was no more than a slight problem to the lightweight manufacturers and the Matchless suited him fine. He says that it was not a good year for crankshafts with his model and he had to strip it and replace it after only 29,000 miles. Few of us had a stable in those days and the Matchless was his "do everything" bike.

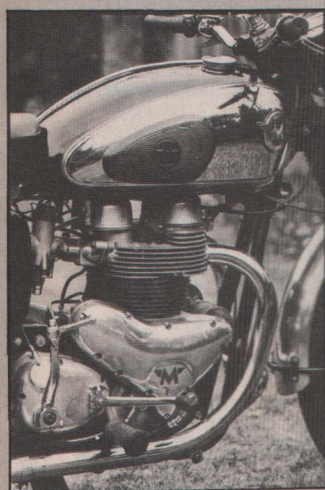
It was used for riding to work, continental touring, weekend trips and, during





the past 19 years, has had three sidecars attached. By 1969 it had worked hard and, especially with the sidecars going on and off, the paint-work had suffered so it was completely stripped and refurbished. The crankshaft (a novel three bearing type) was still working OK and most of its treatment was cosmetic. Pete had expressed a preference for a black rather than red tank right from the start so it has never been traditional red.

From 1969 it continued to be the ride to work bike until 1972, when a BMW came along to steal the Gosden heart (Adrienn, his wife, is a regular companion and has an immaculate BSA Bantam). Since then it has been kept for best, visiting the Elephant rally, AJS & Matchless club events and those show occasions where *all* owners of classic bikes give them an airing. It has just had a second facelift and will naturally remain in the Gosden stable for many years to come. Pete looks forward to the day when he can ride it in the Banbury run – about another twenty years unless the rules are changed.



The interesting thing about the G12 has been its reliability. It has now covered 120,000 miles and, apart from that new crankshaft and big ends, all it has needed is a rebore. The gearbox has never been touched. It is fashionable to talk today of the unreliability of British bikes but, when they were in their heyday, Pete's Matchless was not all that untypical. In fact the AMC twins had something of a reputation for eating main bearings, but this one has always been fine. Mind you, it is not perfect. It vibrates quite badly when pushed and Pete, who really is a long-distance rider, con-



siders that 300 miles in a day is more than enough. I know riders who wouldn't consider *that* on their multi-

cylinder superbikes. In 1961 only Royal Enfield offered a bigger bike so a 650 was really the top class for a touring bike. You had no real choice.

The usual British weaknesses apply to the G12. The six volt lights are poor and the brakes, single leading shoe front and back, are not much better but it compensates for this by getting around corners superbly, even if you can't see them or stop when you get to them! It has had two magnetos and one dynamo in its life and no other mechanical replacements at all. Top speed is 115 mph on the Gosden speedometer, probably a true 110 which compares well with the 108 mph tests showed. That is not far from today's 650s when you

think about it. The fuel consumption leaves modern bikes cold. Usual is 70 mpg at a steady 65/70 mph, at which speed the Matchless is happiest. When pushed hard it drops to 60 mpg.

Pete Gosden's Matchless G12 CSR is a very good example of a middle-of-the-road British sports motorcycle and Pete, indeed, is a good example of the type of rider who forms the backbone of motorcycle club life. It is not perfect but it is a sight better than its detractors would have you believe. It makes a lovely noise and looks right. It was certainly worth every penny of the £281 that was paid in 1961. That is about .25p a mile.

*Bruce Preston*