

January 2017

Hello AMCA Europe Members,

There were no shows or meets since the last newsletter, so this time we have a 'what's in the garage' feature on the bikes I've been working on last year.

Last 2016 Run

First we start with a picture from Claudia Krause of Rhein-Main members enjoying a final run of the year on old and new bikes in Germany:



1930 Harley C Model

And now we see what's been keeping me out of trouble for the last year.



This is a basket case 1930 Harley 500 cc C single found in Australia, with a second loosely assembled project bike next to it. Now we have the first bike on the bench nearly finished:



My that was a struggle. Johnny Sells' book on the 1929-36 Harley small twins was invaluable, as the cycle parts are the same on the 500 cc singles as the early 750 cc small twins. Harley had been producing a 350cc single cylinder bike since 1926, in both side valve and overhead valve forms, alongside the venerable 1000 and 1200 cc pocket valve Big Twin models dating back to 1909. Third place US manufacturer Excelsior upset the apple cart in 1925 with their new 750 cc Super-X V-Twin, which quickly had competition success in hill climbs. In response, Indian took their long running 600 cc Scout out to the 750 cc Sport Scout in 1928, while Harley developed a new side valve 750 cc engine and dropped it into the 350 cc chassis for the 1929 season. Ouch! It was too much engine for the cycle parts, a mistake Indian were to repeat with the one-year 1933 Motoplane.

Half way through the 1929 season Harley introduced a new frame for the 750 cc and 500 cc models, with the stronger forged I-beam forks as well, but the frame couldn't accommodate the generator until a 1932 redesign, giving rise to the 1929-31 'three cylinder Harleys' with the vertical generator driven by a bevel gear. A flurry of Shop Dopes shows various fixes to the generator drive, clutch and gearbox as these were adapted to the more powerful engine. Because of their strong dealer network, Harley were able to sell 15,000 small twins in the 1929-31 period, many going for export. When Harley finally got the design right in 1932, with a new frame accommodating the horizontal generator, plus a revamped engine and transmission, Indian had given up on the 101 Scout because of the cost of the

gear driven primary drive. However, Harley's now technically competitive small twin entered a market where the Great Depression was really starting to bite, and production did not really improve until military production at the end of the decade.

The 350 cc A and B model singles continued with the lightweight frame and forks until 1934, while the 500 cc Model C single sold in modest numbers until also being cleared out in the 1934 season. Maybe it was intended as an entry level machine, but was priced at 84% of the 750 cc bike and 74% of the price of the new side valve VL Big Twin. The engine shares no common parts with other Harley models, and it's hard to find spares today. In the 1930s the Harley C probably cost two or three times an equivalent BSA in Europe, so sales were restrained. I found half a dozen other C singles in Europe during this restoration, none restored because of the cost and difficulty in finding parts.

1929 Henderson KJ Streamline

Well, that book I bought at our Raalte Meet on the Excelsior/Henderson proved very expensive, because it made me buy this KJ at Wauseon:



I've always been interested in the four cylinder bikes, and given my interest in the 1930s a KJ would be the one to have. Again we need a little history. The 1904 four cylinder FN from Antwerp engineer Paul Kelekom was the inspiration for early US fours such as the Pierce. For 1912, engineer William Henderson and brother Tom introduced a 934 cc four with an inlet-over-exhaust (i-o-e) engine on a long wheelbase. After the inevitable financial difficulties the company was sold to Ignaz Schwinn's Excelsior in 1917 and moved from Detroit to Chicago, with 1918 models up to 1100 cc and then a 1301 cc side valve design by Arthur Lemon for 1920-28. Bill Henderson did not care for the heavier bikes, and formed the ACE Motorcycle Company in 1919 to design a lighter sporting four. He was killed riding one in 1922, and the company was sold to Indian in 1927. A one year Indian/Ace was produced that year, followed by various redesigns including the 1935/6 'upside down' fours, until all US four cylinder bike production ceased in 1941.

Meanwhile, back at the Schwinn-owned Henderson-Excelsior factory in Chicago, engineer Arthur Constantine was brought in from Harley in 1928 to update the four cylinder bike, resulting in the 1929 KJ model seen in the picture. It now had a five bearing crankshaft and pressurized oiling, the new aluminium tanks taken out of the frame and put on top to give the streamlined look, a front brake, drop center (modern) wheel rims and a 1301 cc i-o-e engine with large inlet valves. 1929 was the best year for the KJ, produced either side of the October 1929 Wall Street Crash. The sporty KL model came out in 1930, then Schwinn quit the motorcycle business in mid-1931 and retrenched to bicycles, being a businessman who realized the Depression would be around for a long while. About 4200 Excelsiors and Hendersons were built over this period, with the bulk of the Hendersons going to Police service and exports.

This particular example had a US title from 1979 and the full-on 1970s look with wrong year parts, metallic paint, vinyl wiring, stainless steel bolts and excessive chrome. On the other hand, it's a matching numbers bike that ran until I started tearing into it. The plan is to make it 'just a rider' rather than an AMCA 'points bike', so I'll repaint it closer to original, rebuild the wheels, crack test the crank and rods, strip the chrome back to nickel, fit alloy pistons and a 1 1/4" carburettor and see if it will do 100 mph like it's supposed to.

This bike came over to Europe in a shared shipping container for the first time for me. It turned out it cost less for the 3000 mile journey across the Atlantic than the 150 miles in a US truck to the East Coast port, and the bike arrived undamaged. Of course I had to pay handling charges and import duty, but our vehicles department accepted the US title and it's now sitting in my garage with UK plates and papers. More on this restoration later.

The good news is that I was able to download the 1929 Henderson brochure and the KJ Owners Handbook free from the Club Virtual Library, and the parts list from the KJ Website. What a great resource this is for anyone with an old bike!

2016 Review

It was a funny year in the Big World, with the UK vote on membership of the European Union and the US Presidential election both confounding the 'expert' predictions. I attended three AMCA Meets at Oley, Raalte and Wauseon and judged at all of them, having particular fun at Wauseon where the Harley VL was the featured bike and I saw Jay Springsteen racing a KR. My own 1960 Harley KR found a new home during the year, going to a young British vintage racer trading up from a WR, and helping towards the Henderson KJ project. I

saw how the other half lives at the Goodwood Revival, with millions of dollars of antique cars and bikes being thrashed around the race track. And I appeared in a five minute radio interview as a result, but without people then knocking at my door to buy bikes.

Pete Reeves and I continued to provide dating certificates for imported American bikes for our vehicle authority, and we fixed the pricing so that half a dozen UK new members joined for the discounted Club rate. UK registration goes with the frame not the engine, so we spent a lot of time agonizing over Harley steering head forging die numbers and other details.

Several friends and long time AMCA members died during the year, but that can't take away the memories of the fun we had in the past. And long time dealer Dixie Distributing finally closed its doors with the stock liquidated and, I'm guessing, quite a bit of it ending up in land fill.

My VL Restoration book has been 25 years continuously in print this year, so I'm planning at least a sticker on the cover of the current re-revised fifth edition to announce the fact.

2017 Look Ahead

We have a packed programme of fun with old bikes ahead, and I'm already booked for Oley and Raalte. We have the first National Meets of the Italian Chapter and Australian Chapter later in the year, and it looks like I'll have to choose between them. For our own Raalte Meet, details are on our Website at www.amca-europe.eu. This time we'll have a nice package of goodies to support our Chapter, and we'll try to make sure all our visitors have the chance to buy it.

We have a new Club President this year, and I've already been in touch with him to shift our 2018 Meet to avoid another clash with the Southern National. Yes, no good deed goes unpunished, as our 2017 Meet was moved to avoid conflict with the Barber Meet, now cancelled.

I have hopes that sufficient time has now passed that the Blackhawk Chapter will reconcile with the National, and we'll once again see Davenport as a National Meet with judging. I'd also like to see more effort on the Virtual Library, a great resource and a benefit easily worth the Club dues. In the mean time, I'll be spending time restoring and riding old bikes like the rest of us.

2017 AMCA National Meets

February 24-25, Omaha Chapter, Fremont, NE
March 10-11, Sunshine Meet, New Smyrna Beach, FL
April 28-29, Perkiomen Chapter, Oley, PA
May 19-21 Southern Meet, Denton, NC
May 19-20 European Meet, Raalte, NL
June 16-17, Viking Chapter, St. Paul, MN
June 16-17, Fort Sutter Chapter, Dixon, CA
June 30-July 01, Rhinebeck Meet, Rhinebeck, NY
July 21-23, Wauseon Meet, Wauseon, OH
August 04-05, Yankee Chapter, Hebron, CT
August 25-27, Australian Chapter, Sydney, AUS
September 02-03, Italian Chapter, Rimini, Italy
September 29-Oct 01 Chesapeake, Jefferson, PA

2017 AMCA National Road Runs

June 20-22 Rocky Mountain, Black Hawk, CO
July 24-25, Evergreen, Sequim, WA
September 11-13, Fort Sutter, Lake Tahoe, CA
September 20-23, Smoky Mountain, Chattanooga, TN

Other 2017 Events

Germany

31 March-02 April, Veterama, Hockenheim

Oct 06-08, Veterama, Mannheim. Biggest European swap meet. www.veterama.de.

Latvia

July 13-16, Kurland Rally. A 60 bike limit this year, so book early at www.kurlandround.lv.

Netherlands

Aug 11-13, Old Timers Run, Den Haag. Pre-1966 bikes for the 51st time.

Sep 01-03, Alemite Run, Beuningen. www.alemite-motoren.nl.

United Kingdom

March 19. Pioneer Run, 350 pre-1915 bikes

June 18 Banbury Run, 600 pre-1931 bikes

Oct 14-15. Stafford show and auction

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Please volunteer if you would like to be representative for a country not mentioned. You just need to know what bike-related events take place in your country, and answer occasional Email questions.

Don't forget to renew your subscriptions at www.antiquemotorcycle.org

And keep me up to date if you change Email address.

The next newsletter will probably be in April, so please keep sending me articles and photos on bike related items.

Wishing you safe and happy riding, and best regards,

Steve Slocombe,
President AMCA European Chapter

