

THE HISTORY OF THE HOG TROPH

I bought the bike in I think 1970-71, and at that time it was a well-thrashed and used stock Trophy. Having already helped to build the Cretingham Crank Co's first chopper circa 1964-5 (which predated the film Easy Rider) I decided to build something a lot more radical!

1972 – Remember in this era it was sacrosanct to cut and weld up headstocks to give it more rake, so the plan was to make up a really long pair of forks and jack the front end up as much as you dared!

Work started in earnest in about 1972 - tea-breaks, lunch breaks, evenings and weekends when it fitted in with my motor racing career.

The forks, legs and all the linkages are made from T45 tube, I remember the main fork legs costing over £35, which in those days was half a week's wage (I ran on fresh air for a week).

The engine was in a bit of a state so a new set of barrels, pistons, Bonneville cylinder head, crank, rods, rocker gear, bearings and bushes, oil pump, anything that looked a bit tired was replaced. The gearbox had similar treatment and anything that mattered that needed seeing to was done.

Both wheels were rebuilt into borroni rims with galvanised spokes, the rear being the old Triumph part and the front, dare I say it, was a BSA Bantam.

Late 1973 – The whole bike was completely built as, what is known as a dry build, ie no fuel or oils, every bolt was cut to length, studs made, pipework made up, everything was made to fit etc.

The next part of the project was to polish everything that needed it; the backrest took a great deal of time. Engine and gearbox cases were equally labour intensive.

After the marathon polishing session, all the parts were taken to the dingiest, darkest chrome platers I have ever been in, it stank, stank and stank some more and it was with a bit of trepidation that I left all these, to me very

precious parts, with them. They took ages to do it all which got my goat up a bit and I was sure they would lose bits, luckily they didn't.

Meanwhile I was looking for someone to do the paintwork. A friend suggested this chap in Coventry and I duly went to see him and found a real soul mate. His name is Roger Minion and can this guy paint! After a discussion over a bottle of Southern Comfort, he showed me what was possible, beyond my wildest dreams. I thought YES, leave it to him, a big worry off my mind.

The engine and gearbox were rebuilt by three wonderful workmates, Dick Richards, Geoff Rood and Ian Biscoe. Ian ended up running Cosworth Indy Car engine shop in California. This engine has provenance!

The chrome plating eventually was collected, Roger had done his special, special magic on the paintwork, Dick, Geoff and Ian had done their magic on the engine and box, so it was down to me to assemble all these delectable goodies into a complete bike.

All this happened within three days, as everything had been pre-fitted, including the wiring. This last task did include an all-nighter working on it purely because some pessimist had said that bike won't work, his surprise when he arrived at work at 8.00am to find me riding it round the yard caused me to have a very good laugh!

1974 – The next appointment was a MOT test, the Bantam front brake just managed to get through, **JUST!** The bike now legal was ridden at every opportunity, the handling is a bit of a balancing act at low speeds but the faster you go the more stable it becomes, it is far happier at 75mph than at 7½mph!

The longest trip I did on it was from Southam in Warwickshire to Cretingham in Suffolk and this two-way journey turned into a bit of a marathon. I got to Northampton, 20-25 miles from Southam and it occurred to me this may be not such a good idea! I persevered, every fuel stop much rubbing of the backside and swinging of the arms to try to restore feeling and circulation to the vital areas. Please remember this was pre-A14, the old A45, Northampton, Kettering, Kimbolton, Higham Ferrers, St Neots, at Cambridge I stopped for my first pint and refuelled, next stop Newmarket, another pint and a massage of the bum and lots of arm swinging, then Stowmarket – same again. Finally

arrived in Cretingham to rapturous welcome by all my old mates, who were completely astonished by it. A very good session at the pub ensued, they were rather amused by the fact I didn't want to sit down. That epic ride was on a Friday afternoon and the following Sunday afternoon I had to ride the beast all the way back, shit did I ache!

The bike was ridden all over the place that summer and a lot of fun was had.

Late 1974 – I had to take a race car to Donnington Park for a show and it said bikes as well so I loaded it into the race truck and took it there.

While I was mooching about and being asked silly questions about the race car I noticed this chap looking intently at the bike, so I sauntered over to have a chat with him, his opening comment was, “do you want to sell it?” Anyway he made me a silly offer so I sold it; he really, really wanted it. The conversation continued and I found out he was the promoter of Leicester Speedway, a few jokes about getting that bike sideways on shale had us both laughing a lot. This was the end of 1974.

The next chapter in this bike's history

The Leicester Speedway promoter had it in his showroom for several years, he then sold it to one of his riders who had a motorcycle shop and it stood in his showroom for several years. All in all the time actually spent in showrooms is just over 25 years.

The next twist in the tale, the bike was then bought by a Leicester local who liked it so much that he bought it and had it in his bedroom for 12 years! Come and see my big red chopper, the other one does not have an engine in it (what a chat-up line)!

Anyway, how it came home to me

2013 – A message left on the answering machine when I came home to lunch one day, seeing the light flashing, hit the button and a voice saying we're trying to contact a fellow named Gilbert Sills of the Cretingham Crank Co? I duly rang the number, they wanted to know details of when I built it, sent photos of it, was it original, etc. Several conversations later I asked what are you going to

do with it; they said they were selling it on behalf of the man with it in his bedroom.

Anyway a deal was concluded. I went to Leicester, the moment I walked round the corner and saw it; I was so surprised I had forgotten how big it was. It was a bit like meeting an old girlfriend from the 70s that I had really, really good vigorous SEX with, she has not faded as much as I have, she is still very pretty, and unfortunately I have aged, unable to kick her over to get her started for another really good exciting RIDE.

In its 40 years since it was built the bike has only done miles.

When it came back to me in 2013 my first thought was does it still work so I set to, cleaned the points and plugs, added fuel, checked oil levels, still the old green Duckhams 20/50 oil in the tank. The spark plugs removed, the bike onto the starting rollers to wind the oil pressure up, plugs refitted, the thing ran within 3 seconds and once warmed up sat and ticked over like a Swiss watch – not bad for a twin carb motor that hasn't run for 35-40 years! The engine, box, oil tank were then removed to polish and check it all out and refitted with the same set of spanners that put it together 40 years ago.

BIKES ARE TO BE RIDDEN

Adieu Hog Troph

Gilbert Sills