

For some obscure reason, our part of the world has always produced top-class race mechanics who can also ride a bit. Maybe it has something to do with adventurous, lateral thinking souls leaving Europe in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries to breed enthusiastically in the antipodes, while the boring buggers stayed at home to mate with chubby, pasty Englishwomen or Dutch peasant breeding stock with hairy armpits and thick ankles.

The list of South Africans and Rhodesians who've proved themselves better than most at fettling racing motorcycles is a long and illustrious one – Trevor Tilbury, Dozy Ballington, Geoff Lacey, Colin Lyster, Tommy Crawford, Keith Petersen, Tommy Johns, Syd Stacey, and that grand old doyen of race mechanics, Nobby Clark, were all world-class spannermen who could and often did make a living from preparing machinery for top national and international teams. But the real heroes are, for me, those pioneers who worked largely in isolation, producing and developing race-winning motorcycles from, very often, boxes of scrap, and then racing them themselves. You won't find many like that in today's racing world, but in the '50s, '60s and '70s there were – well, not plenty, but enough to make life very interesting.

Back in 1952 Jannie Stander took a very mundane 1946 Velocette 350 MAC and sleeved it down to 250cc in the morning, inserted a BMW 250 crankshaft after lunch, slapped on his own double overhead camshaft conversion before dinner, bolted on a set of Norton forks and an Amal GP carburettor just before bedtime, and then raced it for over a decade, stopping occasionally only to hack the frame a bit more or modify the engine a tad further. He won everything there was to win in the lightweight class at home, then set off to Europe in the early 1960's, where the scruffy, ancient bike gave him a series of podiums against top-class competition at tracks like Brands Hatch, Snetterton and Oulton Park. After Jannie retired, Tommy Johns raced the venerable Velocette successfully for two more years, by which time it was nearly as old as its rider. There is at least one known Boksnot in captivity, but rumour has it that there may have been as many as five derivatives built over the years.

Charlie Harris of East London was another motorcycle building genius. Way back in 1969 he cast a set of crankcases, made up his own crankshaft and bolted on the top ends from two Yamaha 250 twins, giving him a 500cc Yamaha four-cylinder two-

stroke engine that, in the hands of future SA Formula One champ Ian Scheckter, set a new lap record around the East London GP circuit the following year. The Harris Four was quick and it was famous! Unfortunately, it never made its way to Europe to have its mettle tested against serious international competition, and thus never realised its full potential.

Another adventurous South African was Capetonian Ray Flack, who in the late sixties slotted a three-cylinder two-stroke 1000cc DKW car engine into a homemade frame modelled on Ray Amm's infamous Norton Kneeler. By all accounts that thing went like stink and sounded gorgeous - you just had to make allowances for the brakes and handling. If anybody knows where that bike is now, please give us a shout!

But the *Two Wheels Award for Daring and Definitive Lifetime Experimentation (TWADDLE)* goes to – drum toll - Andreas “George the Greek” Georgeades, who had clearly never heard the dictum “if it ain't broke, don't fix it.” George was a successful racer who won the international Dickie Dale Trophy on a G50 Matchless in 1963, came second in the SA 500cc Championship the same year, then rushed off to the '64 Isle of Man TT to pick up a bronze replica for 27th place in the Senior TT. He also ventured into Canada, where he claimed the 1966 500cc national championship on a Velocette. The following year George took a 5th in the 1967 Canadian 500 GP on the same dated bike, so he certainly knew how to ride. But it was for his incredible home made Honda 500 Four that George is best remembered in South Africa.

In the early '70s our Hellenic hero built his own 500c four-cylinder racer, utilising a heavily mutilated Honda 600cc car engine as a base. “I shared a garage with him in London while he was building the motor,” says '70s racer Mike Grant of Pietermaritzburg. “It was unbelievable. The bottom end was a Honda car engine, but he got rid of the water jackets and machined fins onto the block to make it air-cooled. He sleeved the bores down to 500cc and used the four-valve cylinder heads and other bits from the Honda 250 Twin race kit. It sounded glorious and went like stink.” George coupled his motor to a six-speed gearbox, stuffed the lot into a modified Manx Norton frame, and went racing. It didn't do too well in the corners or on the

brakes, but won a couple of races in South Africa and the USA, where its owner now lives.

If you're still unsure whether this eccentric fellow really existed it shouldn't take you long using Google to establish why George qualifies for the "Lifetime" part of the TWADDLE award. The effervescent enthusiast who started off working in his father's Johannesburg restaurant to fund his racing simply never tired of fixing things that aren't broken. He has so far, if you can believe all of what's posted on the Internet, built at least three Ferrari-engined motorcycles, the first two using six cylinder Dino engines (one supercharged), and the third using a 250 hp V8 from a '78 Dino.

Taking a car engine and wrapping a motorcycle frame around it isn't, of course, such a big deal, but the V12 Honda he then went on to build is. Take two Honda CBX 1000 engines, fabricate a set of crankcases to bolt the cylinders onto, with gears or chains linking the dual crankshafts, and you have the makings of a two litre 200+ horsepower V12 motorcycle. That really does sound like the work of George the Greek to me...

REWARD! One year's subscription to 2Wheels magazine if you know George's whereabouts and get him to contact us for a Rider Focus interview!

ENDS

Gavin Foster

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