

## **A Life in the Days of a Biker**

By Dave Norton, Secretary/Treasurer/Historian, Gold Wing Touring Association, Region A Chapter M, Mountain Valley Riders

### **Part One: In the Beginning**

Motorcycles were my downfall. The first, a saucy Italian wench named Lambretta, came into my life in 1960. She was more than a bit rumped around the edges, and had been around the block a few times more than a few times. Jim Hill, Tim Cunningham and I, high school buddies in Garden Grove, CA, pooled our lunch money and bought her for \$45, \$15 each. Tim took one ride, realized he didn't know how to stop her, strong-willed as she was, and, football player that he was, threw a shoestring tackle at a passing phone pole. He had had enough. She wandered off a ways and lay down to rest. And then there were two.

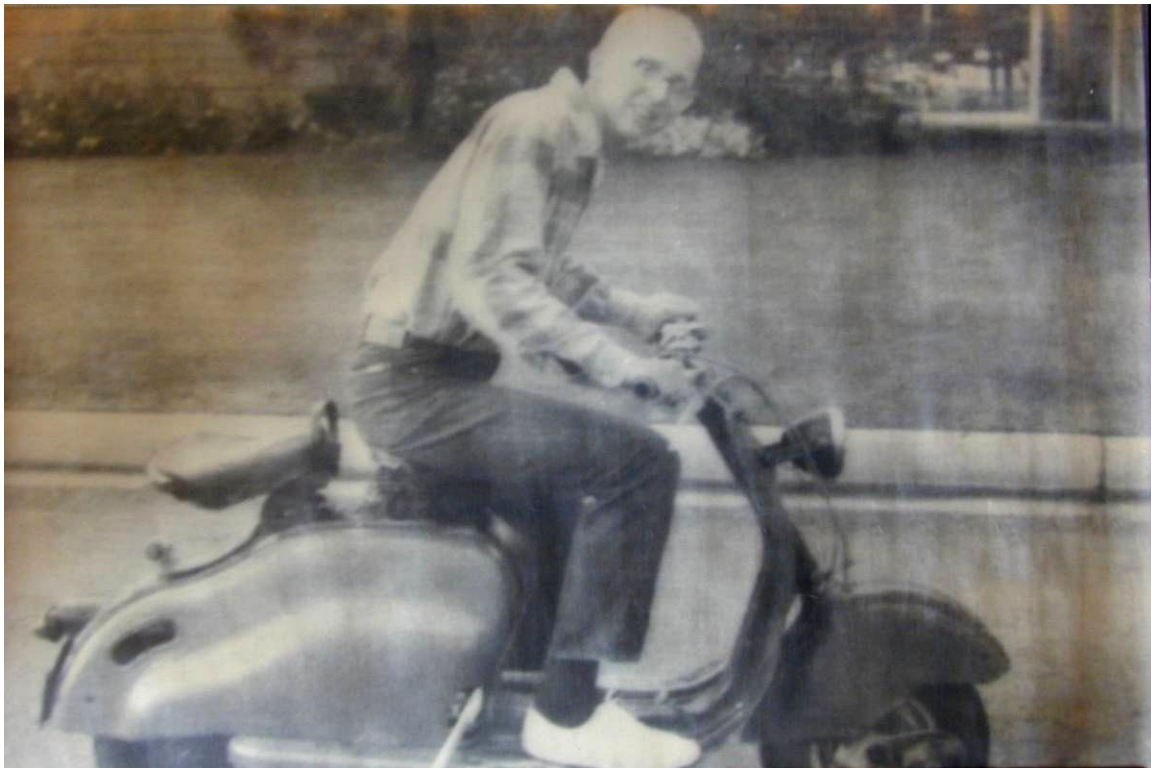


Photo: Dave Norton

I didn't own a helmet then (for sissies, and besides, I wear glasses so my eyes are already protected). My opinion changed on my first ride into the country. Fate presented me with a largish grasshopper

squarely in the nose at only about 35 mph. It brought tears to my eyes and a Bell Compac with bubble-shield to my riding attire.

Jim and I flailed her incessantly, with frequent trips into the wilds around Lake Mathews for lizard plinkin'. Ah, she served us well and truly. She was a high-maintenance beauty, as those hot-headed Italians are wont to be, but, treated with some modicum of respect, she would provide many a happy mile in exchange for ten cents worth of reclaimed oil and a 25 cent gallon of Hancock's finest regular.

Three incidents stand out: First, returning home on the unavoidable freeway through the Santa Ana Canyon (she hated crowds); she displayed her displeasure by shedding her skirt. The sensuously formed side panel jumped ship and slid along behind us and under the wheels of the following car. By the time we recovered the tattered remains, it had been mightily smitten. We used a handy rock to do a bit of reshaping of our own, wired the offending panel in place, and soldiered on.

The second incident involved an occasionally repeated bit of high theatre involving a broken up-shift cable. Jim, riding Mechanic on the pillion, would wrap the end of the cable around a stick and do yank-on-demand. We worked it into a well coordinated dance: on acceleration we would work up through the gears at full chat by verbal command: "Prepare to upshift...upshift...NOW!" I would roll off the throttle an instant and back on. The replacement cables became a significant expense (more than \$2.00), so I dumped the cable system entirely and brazed a long brass rod on the shifter bellcrank, with a Coors beer tapper handle on the top. I could then shift myself without benefit of my riding mechanic, either by hand or foot.

The third incident would happen unannounced when least expected, usually while trying to make flank speed over rough ground. The entire exhaust system was one piece, a rusty can the shape of a small rumped throw-pillow placed directly under the engine, ahead of the rear tire. Its attachment to the engine was tenuous at best. When it came from together, two things happened in rapid succession: the Sound and the Fury. The effect was indistinguishable from that of having trod upon a small land mine. The suddenly unmuffled roar of the entire 175cc of exploding gasses combined with the rear wheel *yumping* over this new large metal rock at just the wrong place and time had a most off-putting effect: off into the weeds, usually.

What this sleek black beauty did best, however, was whet my appetite for Motorized Adventure. The lust she awakened within us both would not be denied. The road beckoned, and she had taken us just about as far as she could, both figuratively and literally.  
*To be continued...*

## Part 2: Racer Russell

*Last episode, Dave's (somewhat) trusty old Lambretta had taken him and buddy Jim about as far as she could. This is when Russ steps into the picture...*

My best buddy Russ Miller is a hunter. He was born with a deer rifle in one hand a Bowie knife in the other. That fact led to our being among Honda's early adopters. It started with an ad in Field & Stream magazine in 1961, a hunter carrying a deer on his Honda Trail 55. I can still picture the photo: deer slung across the luggage rack, deer rifle in its scabbard tied to the front forks, the rider dressed in hunting pants and a heavy jacket, climbing up out of the deep woods. Here's a similar ad from that era:

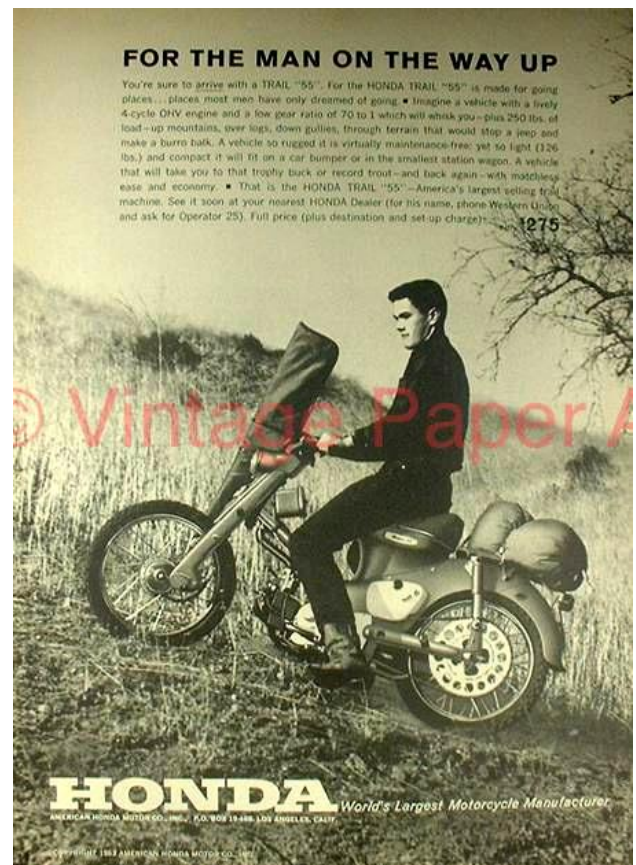


Photo: Vintage Paper Ads

In those days, about the only mechanized transport aimed at wilderness travel was the Tote-Gote, an ungainly device notable for its small tires and large mass:



Photo: minidoodle.com

The Trail 55 opened the backwoods (for good or ill) to the teeming masses learning to be free. It also introduced Russ and me to a new dimension in wheel-to-wheel racing. Racing was not, you see, new to us. It all really started with a shiny new bright red Schwinn bicycle on Christmas 1957. One speed, Bendix coaster brake, chrome spokes and rims, wide balloon tires, what would later be known as a "beach cruiser". It was my first absolutely brand new vehicle, and I loved it. No frills, no derailleur to break, no fiddly caliper brakes, simplicity itself, bulletproof.

Russ, Chance and I spent many a summer Saturday cruising the dirt fire roads around Irvine Park hunting snakes and High Adventure.



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Photo: Dave Norton

Whenever Russ and I are together, from sixth grade to the present, we compete. From games like Stratego, Battleship and Wff'n'Proof, to swing-jumping, to high-altitude backpacking and trout fishing, we each set out to outdo the other. One such impromptu "contest of speed" took place on just such a summer Saturday:

We were headed home from the Irvine hills, on a long straight downhill dirt road with a T intersection at the bottom. As we headed into the downhill, I broke away first, head down and pedaling furiously. Having gotten the jump on Russ, I had a slight lead coming into the turn at the T. I braked heavily and just made the turn when I heard a yelp and a crunch behind me. I looked back: no Russ! I turned around and headed back to the turn.

What had happened was this: Russ had been gaining on me on the downhill and left his braking 'till the last moment. He hit the backpedal hard, and the rusty clamp holding the Bendix torque arm to the frame parted, the rear hub spun free, and Russ was flat out of both brakes and luck. He hit the bank straight on, hard. The front axle sheared, the wheel buckled, the fork buried itself, and that bicycle was done flying. Russell, however, was not. He was pitched over the bars and flew spread-eagled straight onto the sturdy barbed-wire fence, which whanged him right back on the ground in front of his oddly-parked bike.

His shirt was in ribbons and little streams of blood oozed from a dozen evenly-spaced puncture wounds across his chest and abdomen. I bailed off my bike and ran to him. Dazed, he looked at me, down at the bloody mess, back at me, and began laughing. We both roared with laughter until our sides hurt. A local resident had seen the carnage and called the Sheriff, who called Russ's Mom to come and fetch up the tattered remains of her only son ... again.

Ah, but I digress. That tiny add in *Field & Stream* brought visions of real wheel-to-wheel racing, under Power! And, it brought the promise of new roads and trails, far away from home. Just how far, in Russ's case at least, I wouldn't have guessed.

*To be continued...*

### Part 3: The Racer's Edge

*Last time Dave and buddy Russ had found an ad in Field & Stream for the new Honda Trail 50...*

Russ and I were hooked on the new Honda trail bikes; we each had to have one. Long Beach Honda provided them, \$200 each, and they even swapped motors so we got the 4-speed tranny from the 50 Sport C110 version, at no charge (they happened to have a lady customer who really wanted the automatic clutch in her C110, it was a simpler world then). I recall vividly the first trip Russ and I took on the bikes together, up Highway 39 out of Garden Grove to the San Gabriel Mountains of Southern California. Cruising side-by-side through Buena Park, we could hear the beat frequency of the two exhausts thrumming against each other, what a feeling of raw power!





Photos: Dave Norton

It helps to have some grasp of the state of exhaust system technology in those early years: no mufflers ... at all. The entire exhaust system consisted of a 1" diameter chromed steel pipe running down and back, with a rounded bull-head cap closing the end. The outlets were a set of narrow vertical slots in the completely hollow pipe. We thought the exhaust note had a crisp bark to it then. The same sound now would send dogs yelping away and cops waiting on your driveway before you ever got the garage door up. This was the beginning of a high-frequency hearing loss we both share. WHAT? I SAID THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF...oh, never mind.

At about this time, buddy Blake invited us to join his family for their annual trek to the Santa Barbara Road Races, an event that was to shape both our lives (in avocation and vocation, to varying degrees). As we approached the circuit (the Goleta municipal airport), we could hear the high whine of the Grand Prix bikes knifing up through the gears, the scream echoing off the rows of hangars and buildings in an eerie wail. I still feel that same tingle and my heart drops a gear and



punches it each time I approach any racing venue and hear that siren song. Honda was all-powerful then, winning all three Grand Prix motorcycle classes across the board.

Images, audio and visual, persist through the years: Ken Miles in a tiny silver giant-killer RS-60... Billy Krause in the brutishly beautiful Tipo 61 Birdcage Maserati... Jim Parkinson's ill-handling but blindingly fast Campbell Special... The Long Beach MG Club's Morris Minor flatbed truck following the thundering herd of A-Production Corvettes off the grid into turn one, the guys bailing out to fetch the various Fiberglass evidence of conflict... And, one scene in particular: Russ and I on the fence, watching the *Sedan* class come off the back straight under braking for the last turn, as a Volvo 444 and 850 Mini battle furiously for next-to-last place. It was at that point that we reached that most dangerous and expensive of realizations: Hell, WE could do better than that!

With our bikes, Russ and I taught ourselves the elements of road racing at the 5 hp level, on dirt fire roads. Of most value were the coasting races: starting at the top of Black Star Canyon Road and coasting the two or so miles down, we learned the value of conserving momentum, minimizing braking and maximizing exit speed. Trail braking (no pun intended), delayed apex, and treading the very edge of the friction circle brought immediate benefits. Smoothness and fluidity were all. A locked brake on the dirt surface under these conditions would often have meant a trip over the edge and into the pucker-bushes.

Our trusty Honda Trail 50s did yeoman service for us through the following summer, until our sophomore year at college beckoned.

*To be continued...*

## Part 4: SoCal to Oregon on 50cc a day!

*Last episode Dave and Russ had finished high school and bought a brace of Honda's new Trail bikes...*

Late in the summer of '62, Russ decided he would enjoy having his Honda Trail 50 with him at school. Trouble was, "school" was in Medford Oregon, and Russ was in Garden Grove California. *Definite obstacle*, there. Russ is not one to finesse such things, and took the direct approach. One bright fall morning, without malice of forethought, he committed Journey. He lashed a carefully selected

smattering of gear atop the tiny luggage rack and to various other handy points, and simply headed north. He stopped at my house on the way, said he wouldn't be home again for awhile, and hit the road with a smile and a jaunty wave, not a care in the world.



Garden Grove to Medford? On this? Photo: CycleChaos.com

He asked me to stop by his house to stow a few things he'd neglected to put away. What I found there took me somewhat aback: the front door stood open, lights on, nobody home (his folks having themselves left for Oregon the week before), and the driveway strewn with gear. A bag of extra cold-weather clothes (no room), a box of canned food (no room), a Coleman stove and fuel (no room), tackle box (ditto), shaving gear-gloves-boots-cookset-oil-scarf-...well, you get the picture. No...uh... room. I began to wonder what he *had* taken with him. What I did see as he departed was his 15-year old Western Auto cotton sleeping bag with little duckies inside and most of the stuffing having abandoned ship years ago, a wad of clothes wrapped in a Navy surplus jacket, banged-up surplus canteen, a trout rod sticking straight up and a rifle in scabbard tied to the front forks (now where had I seen *that* before?). The man gives new meaning to the concept of "Just Do It".

Now, many fine folks have set out on mille-mile trips into the Frozen North during the turn of the season aboard a motorcycle. It's

uncomfortable (I can tell you, from personal experience), but it's generally over quickly. Unless, that is, you have *maybe* five horsepower to motate you, your bike, and your gear along. The Honda Trail 50 was good for an honest 47 mph on the flat, the book says. With the rider lying down, chin on the speedometer, legs straight out behind and toes pointed. This is somewhat of a practical limitation on just which roads you can attain this blinding velocity *on*. California freeways are not, alas, among them.

This rules out the direct approach of 99 North through Bakersfield and Sacramento along the western side of the Sierras (flat, straight, smooth, low, shorter, warmer), and leaves the eastern route (hilly, curvy, rough, higher, longer, colder). But, it's a gloriously beautiful stretch up 395 through Riverside, Lone Pine, Bishop, up to Lake Tahoe and Susanville, across the Lassen National Forrest, through Mount Shasta and Yreka, into Oregon and finally to Medford. A quick check on Google Maps says that route is 846 miles and should take a tick over 16 hours. And he's got nothing (especially speed) but time. Easy Pie! All true, until the reality of the Unrelenting Cold blows down from the North. But Russ is a hunter, you see, and he was hunting for Medford and would not be denied.

You really ought to hear his description of the next five days from him:

*Left in the late afternoon and climbed Angeles Crest Highway to the desert and on out 14 to 395. Nice night; some warm air some cold air. Arrived Lone Pine at daylight and hung a left up to Whitney Portals campground for a couple hours rest/sleep. Got back aboard Big Red and slowly made headway up 395 on the bike over Sherwin Summit (about 6,000 feet), very slow up Conway Grade, barely over the top in the saddle (about 8,000 feet).*

*Somewhere near Bridgeport was a hill called Dead Man Pass at 8,000+ feet. I could just manage to stay on the bike at about one or two mph at full throttle for the last couple hundred yards. Went through Minden Nevada at dusk and got to State Line at Lake Tahoe via a small paved road that had a sign prohibiting trailers and at least one curve sign reading 5mph. I wanted to put in somewhere around the edge of the lake for a nights sleep, but the area was so cabiny that it was uncomfortable to camp anywhere. I did stop for a while and eat a can of peaches carried from home. Staples were canned peaches and canned pork and beans.*

*I got back aboard and rode to Truckee. Snow on the sides of the road - incredibly cold - hands numb, face numb - feet shaking involuntarily on the foot pegs, keeping time with bouncing kneecaps. I stopped in Truckee at an all-night Cafe and had a cup of coffee and a doughnut and took as long as patronagely possible to down it. Walked back out into the crackling night and got on the machine and stayed on until Sierraville. About four in the morning here at the T intersection in the middle of town, I got off the bike and urinated on the white line.*

*Some miles further on was the town of Quincy. I bought some gas at a station and sat in the station office at the invitation of the proprietor who could see my state of discomfiture. After I sat down, my legs and kneecaps started jumping uncontrollably. Pressing them down with my hands was little help, but eventually they stopped and I made my way to a local park and rolled out my sleeping bag on top of a picnic table (lots of ants on the ground).*

*That day was some good riding. Across the volcanic flatlands of northeastern California and through Lassen National Park. Made two stops - the first to see a lava tube. Some guy was there to see it also and he had a flashlight, so we went all the way to the north end of the tube and back. The other stop was to push my bike over the last quarter-mile of Lassen Pass [8,000++ feet]. I remember fiddling with something on the bike and touching the exhaust pipe with the back of a finger and getting an instant sear-to-hard-crust burn. Stopped in McCloud for gas. The route I took had no gas stations for the last 50 miles or so, so I thought I was running on fumes when I rolled into the station at McCloud. The gas pumper asked how much I thought it would take and I said "35 cents worth." He said that there was a Honda dealer in town and when he filled up a factory-new empty tank on a 50 it took 35 cents. And so did mine.*

*From McCloud, it was an easy trip up and over the Siskiyou Mountains to Oregon. On the way up the grade, there was a fairly wide paved shoulder [2-3 feet] which I rode in at about 10mph with one leg on the handlebars. On the way down, it was a winding two-lane highway on which I could get some speed. I digress here to discuss speed - on a flat road, sitting up, I could get up to 53. Laying down and nursing the gas (slowly leaning the throttle or backing off as I held speed and then slowly*

*winding up again would increase speed) I could get up to 57. Downhill I could get near 65 and did so out of the Siskiyou, passing cars in corners on the white line as opposing traffic wondered what was going on. The being-passed driver would often not notice me until I reached his side window.*

*That ended that trip to Medford; but I also rode to Corvallis and back twice. One time, coming over the last pass before reaching the town of Grants Pass, it was just after dark and I was trying to get to the top before a long line of traffic caught up to me and forced me to use the shoulder of the two-lane highway. My urgency continued as I rolled over the top and started down the four-lane part. Nursing the throttle to gain all the speed I could to stay ahead of traffic on the downhill, I noticed after a mile or so that the engine was in a range I hadn't heard before and that in that last corner, marked "55mph," my rear tire slid slightly [it was lightly sprinkling]. Wondering how fast I was going, I tried to see the speedometer by lifting my head from my full prone position. No luck the first few times. I sat up more and hunted for the needle which was nowhere on the dial. I finally found it over the left side of the odometer near 0 mph. My calculation was that I was doing about 75.*

Suffice to say, Russ did make it to OSU on time. It is instrumental to point out that, at the end of that term, the Honda rode home in comfort, asleep in one of the crates used to ship Honda 50s from Japan, in a boxcar. When Russ pulled the head to refresh the engine, he found something I haven't encountered before or since. The exhaust valve was badly bent (no surprise there!) but over time carbon built up filling the gap between the valve and seat, maintaining a seal and reasonable compression. Amazing!

*To be continued...*

## Part 5: Benly Rocks!

*Last time we rode with Dave's buddy Russ from Southern California to Corvallis Oregon on a Honda Trail 50. Now we pick up Dave again...*

In 1963 the devastation of a badly broken heart led me to overcook a creek crossing on the Trail 50, sliding into a tree and crumpling the sheet metal forks. The repaired bike went to brother Dan and it was time to move up to a *real motorcycle*, the Honda 150 Benly Touring. What a beauty, 16.5 hp at 10,500 rpm, all shiny sweepy black bodywork, chrome accents and *whitewall tires*. It was definitely a

*Meet the Nicest People on a Honda* sort of bike. While Russ was back at school, Buddy Jim Hill had worn out his 125 Bridgestone by then and bought a matching one.



Photo: Jim Hill



Photo: Dave Norton

The overriding mental picture of our rides then featured Bell shorty helmets with snap-on bubble shields, with the bottom stuffed full of scarves and rags to keep out the winter cold. I have no idea how I managed to see at all as the early morning fog made my glasses all

but opaque. This won't do. My Dad's Harley had a nice windshield, so I added one to the Benly. In those days windshields were mounted to the handlebars rather than the frame. They don't do that now. We're about to learn why. On the first test ride all went well up to 60 mph when the dreaded gollywobble set in: a divergent oscillation, the amplitude increasing with each cycle. I did manage to horse it back down, and went back and found a series rubber skidmarks on the street caused by the front wheel skidding first right then left, for 50 feet or so. A slight adjustment of the angle fixed it, but fear of a recurrence had it benched for the duration.

On an early ride home from the Times Grand Prix at Riverside I was pacing friend Larry's new MGB. We left a light together and in the middle of third gear I realized we were racing. I wound it tight to 10-5 and bang-shifted it up into...*SECOND* to the sound of a zillion revs and a skidding rear tire! It turns out Honda had changed the shift pattern between the Trail 50 and later bikes, a fact that eluded me in the heat of battle! No harm done, amazingly. Tough little motor!

They say God watches over fools and children, and sure enough when a front tire burst on Jim's Benly at 70 on a long downhill he somehow managed to rein it in safely. On another ride we were caught south of Mojave CA in a terrible sandstorm, with a wicked cross-wind forcing us slower and slower. At about 25 mph, a gust pushed both bikes off the road and into the bushes, ending the ride for that day. The closest thing to shelter was a ravine into which we pushed our bikes and tied a tarp between them. We curled up in our sleeping bags and spent a miserable night in the howling wind and sand. In the morning we literally poured sand out of our ears, packed up and continued on.

Three of us shared an apartment in the small town of Belmont Shore, CA, right next to a tidal flat where dirt bikers would gather for impromptu races. It was run-what-ya-brung racing every Saturday. No rules, no classes, with a course a mix of flat-track and TT. Now a 150 Benly is definitely NOT a dirt bike: more weight than torque, lots of expensive bodywork, peaky motor, and a good honest 1-3/4" of suspension travel unimpeded by any significant damping, But, it was fun putzing around the track.

Well, as time went on, I began "improving" the Benly: Dunlop Trials Universal tires, pitch the front fender, lose the high-rise handlebars in favor of a set of longhorns, dump the whisper-pipes for those sexy cross-over scrambler pipes, with Snuff-or Nots to let the neighbors sleep. Oh what a mellow thrumming note they produced! But the

stopwatch showed the open scrambler pipes made the bike slower, no top end. So, I found that Pep Boys VW exhaust tips would hose-clamp right on to the Honda down-pipes where the stock mufflers attached. This delivered great top end, but no torque. Hmmm, perhaps those Japanese engineers weren't so dumb.

The high point in my Benly racing career came after out-running a real 250 Scrambler on the track by sheer force of youthful ignorance. The defeated rider came over after and said "Kid, you got some hair!" That remains one of the most sincere and favorite compliments before or since. Dirt-tracking the Benly ended shortly after when I got off on the high side, the rubber foot peg got torn off and the 1/2" steel rod whanged my thigh right to the bone, filling my riding boot with blood. In the clinic the young doctor did his best to dissuade me from similar silliness by scrubbing the wound with lye soap (I swear!) and a bristle brush, and punctuating his lecture with an extra tug on the suture: Young man don't you EVER do such a DUMB trick like THAT again...  
*To be continued...*

## Part 6: Santa Rides a Honda!

*Last time Dave had moved up the Honda line from his Trail 50 to a shiny new 150 Benly Touring, on which he inexplicably entered the world of impromptu dirt bike racing...*

By late '65 buddy Jim's marriage went sour and he needed money for a divorce so I lent him \$200. At that time Norm Reeves Honda in Santa Ana CA held a contest. Test ride a Honda and enter their Santa Rides a Honda contest. Jim rode, entered, and won! The prize was a spanking new black Honda S65, one of their earliest overhead cam singles. 6.2 whopping ponies at 10,000 rpm, 56 mph top. Jim was bike

rich and money poor, so I inherited the S65 as payment.



Photo: Chris Hartman



It was a real screamer, but my tastes were becoming increasingly down and dirty, so it went in trade with the Benly for a new Honda CL160 Scrambler. It seemed a fine compromise, some off-road capability yet street able. Jim soon leap-frogged me onto a nice 250 Scrambler and our trips tended more toward the desert.



Photo: Jim Hill



Photo: cyclechaos.com

The Lucerne dry lake near Adelanto was a favored haunt. One unfortunate jackrabbit happened to bolt in front of us and high-tailed it out across the lakebed. We gave chase but as soon as we got near he made a 90° turn at 30 mph and gained 100 yards before we could catch up again. By my odometer he made it over a mile before collapsing exhausted. We watched Brer Rabbit recover and head home to tell his friends of the snarling beasts he had so skillfully eluded!

In '68 my 160, my new wife and I, and lock stock and barrel headed north to Stead Air Base north of Reno NV to work for Bill Lear trying (unsuccessfully) to drag the steam car kicking and screaming into the 1960s, opening vast new horizons to exploration by motorcycle. In those days you could start out at Peavine Mountain and ride in any direction other than a 30° segment toward Reno and find nary a fence or "No Trespassing" sign.

The 160 gained local fame by becoming the first bike in anyone's experience to sink in a dry lake. Said dry lake, north of the Lear hangar, was absolutely dead flat and perhaps a quarter mile across. It would fill with runoff in the winter and freeze over offering an inviting challenge for Scrambler and me on a Saturday after work. Wife #1 Marilyn, eight months pregnant, called me at work to suggest I might want to amble on home as she might be starting early labor. I asked if I had time for a short detour, she agreed, and I headed out to the lake.

I could walk out on the ice, which would crack under my feet and sink an inch into the muddy bottom. By rolling out onto the ice with both feet sliding along the front wheel would ride on the ice and the rear would break through, kicking up a nice rooster tail of mud, water, and ice. After a couple of short runs along the edge I figured I'd do one more run straight across the middle, right between those two piles of dirt. All was fine, ski-iding along at 20 till I got right between the two piles and SCHLUMPH! Next thing I knew I was still astride the Scrambler, which had disappeared entirely except for the two rear-view mirrors. I was up to my bellybutton in muddy water and 1" thick ice chunks.

The dirt piles, of course, had been put there that summer by a backhoe digging a coffin-sized hole to measure the water table. I climbed out, hiked back to work, called Marilyn (it turned out son Christopher graciously waited another two weeks) I'd be a bit late, and winced

under an hour's barrage of jeers, guffaws and hoots of derision as the rest of the crew took the old Land Cruiser out to the edge, hoiked the bike out of its nearly-final rusting place, and winched it back to dry land. We drained the oil and gas, pulled the plug, flushed it all with kerosene, refilled the fluids and hit the starter...it RAN! Perfectly!

It wasn't but a few weeks later when I'd been bashing through the boonies, came out on 395 and headed north at 70 mph. Unknown to me, I had jarred the oil drain plug loose, lost it somewhere out there, and the 160's life blood was drawing a diminishing line on the road behind me. It went something like this:

*MmmmmmmmmmmmmrrrrmmmmmmrrrrrrrrmmrrrrrrrrRRRRRRRRRRNN  
NNK!*

I declutched before the rear wheel locked. Again, haul it home, drain the oil...scratch that...get a new drain plug, refill the oil, pray, pray again, and it RAN! AGAIN! Admittedly, the motor was just a bit off-song, not bad, really, just different.

So, time for another change. This time I wanted a dirt bike that was street legal rather than a street bike the *looked* like a dirt bike that was street legal. Unfortunately, the Yamaha and Honda two-stroke enduros hadn't appeared yet, and I opted for the Suzuki TC120 for \$400, along with new pals Larry Orr and Bob Davids. Mine and Bob's were yellow, Larry's a deep orange.



Photo: cyclechaos.com

We honed our skills at a sandlot play-pit out towards Lemon Valley. The Suzi was light, came with knobbies, 12 hp at 8,000 rpm, and had 3-speed box with a two-speed transfer case that could be shifted on the fly. It was a marginal motorcycle. There was (is?) a long downhill going in to Reno from Stead. Every time, *every time* I rode to town I had to stop at the bottom, pull the plug and remove the whisker from between the electrodes, replace it and be off. It never fouled a plug otherwise. Well, almost never.

When the job evaporated (a sad story of lost opportunity), we hit the road again.

*To be continued...*

## Part 7: On (Almost) Any Sunday!

*Last time Dave's Honda 150 led to a new 160 Scrambler (which he sunk in a dry lake!) and a Suzuki TC120...*

1969 found us in San Diego still chasing the elusive dream of a marketable steam car, this time with Steam Power Systems. An exciting time: a new son, ground floor opportunity at a job I loved, and our first new home (at \$24,995!) in Mira Mesa. An early desert ride with buddy Russ introduced us to something new: a very cool white-tank 2-stroke from Yamaha, the DT1 250 Enduro. It just looked so completely *right* and sounded like no other two-stroke: a deep *basso profundo* growl compared to the *ring-ding-ding-ding* ear-piercing expansion chambers on the racing two-strokes. Little did we know that this bike would do for Yamaha and dual-purpose motorcycles what the CB750 did for Honda and street bikes: they would bring new riders into the sport by the tens of thousands.

The *Suzi* made up part of the \$600 cost of my own Enduro, a CT1B 175. It was the perfect bike for the time. The *Yamahammer* and I could ride cross-country from Mira Mesa to Clairemont Mesa, across Miramar Naval Air Station property and a nice yump across the railroad tracks. Many weekends that winter were spent "muddin'" the dirt roads and trails on Black Mountain.

When our company hired consultant engineer Mike Savin, we discovered a shared interest in dirt bikes. Mike convinced me to enter my first motocross, on June 28, 1970. My race prep comprised removing the luggage rack and taping the lights! Mike's Greeves ran

250 Expert class; me, in 175 Novice. He made a last minute shift lever adjustment just before his first heat (*never* a good idea), pushed his bike up to the starting line, kicked it over, and stalled. It stalled again and again, as the field left without him. He got a push start and motored off in last place. After the race he found that moving the shift lever one spline brought it into the path of the start lever and poked it into gear!

When my first heat race came up, I was all butterflies, left hand on my helmet, right hand goosing the throttle ... the flag dropped and I was still going for the clutch as the rest of the riders just dumped it into first at full throttle. First lesson learned! Over the course of the three heats I passed very few riders and noticed the fast guys either overcooking a turn or off with mechanical problems. I thought I did OK just staying on course for three heats. At the trophy presentation I was dumbstruck when they said the 175 Novice winner was **me!**



Photo: Dave Norton

For the next two years the 175 and I ran many races at Miramar and other local venues, finishing mid-field or just out of a trophy. We ran the last "real" Elsinore Grand Prix in '72, a year after Steve McQueen ran it for *On Any Sunday*.



Photo courtesy Dave Norton

In '71 the problem was mud. In '72 it was DUST. I started at the tail end of the grid, after the sidecars, entry number 1,070, with 1,069 bikes churning it up in front of me! It was insane out on the dry lake bed. You couldn't see 20 feet ahead. My poor little stock paper air filter packed up and went "uhhhhno" halfway through the 100 mile race, and in truth I was totally exhausted and quite relieved.

Scary as running blind through the Elsinore dust was, the downhill at Carlsbad was worse. The "shoes" were getting 50 feet of air off the ledge halfway down, my clearest evidence of the huge gap between riding at their level and at mine.

Shortly after my motocross debut another buddy bought a CZ 250 race bike. It was three years old but brand new, having spent that time in its original crate sitting in a warehouse. He assembled it on a Friday night and we trucked it and my 175 to a camping spot on the beach in Baja California. I spent three days riding, Mike spent three days trying unsuccessfully to get the bike to run. He says the only time he has bike problems is when I'm around. My clearest memory of that trip is that of flying through the air horizontally at about 25 mph *sans* bike, boots up and helmet down, watching the ground pass by in slow motion "over" my head and idly thinking "Boy, this is really going to hurt when that ground catches up with my head."

My punkin head survived that one, and another one involving riding under a railroad culvert. The wood beams of the culvert were about five feet above the dry streambed. I ducked down, chin on the bars and just cleared the beams. I pattered through the culvert right up to the last beam when another bike dropped down in front of me, headed in from the opposite end. Surprised, I looked up just in time to catch that last beam squarely just above my face shield. My head rotated back 90° (kids don't try this at home) and I watched the bottom of that beam grinding against my face shield until we popped out the other side. To this day, some 38 years later, I've never had a stitch of neck or back trouble. Amazing.

About this time friend Skip Carlson and I were discussing a problem in his neighborhood in Rancho Bernardo, a high-end suburb of San Diego. Kids were riding dirt bikes on the golf courses! Using Skip's contacts with the city, we were able to form a motorcycle club just for kids, the Rancho Bernardo Dirt Riders. AVCO, the local developer donated the use of several acres of land, and a D8 Cat and driver for a day. We marked out a fine motocross track in the rolling hills and publicized meetings for all interested parties. The rules and by-laws we came up with were later used by the San Diego Police in setting up similar kid clubs in other areas of the county. We started with about ten kids. Motocross racing morphed into Observed Trials events (slow riding over rough ground demanding extremely fine control). We developed some very talented Trials riders.

Similar Trials groups in the South Bay area suggested an area-wide field meet. Skip contacted AVCO for permission. They said they'd get back to us. The word spread and we had inquiries from Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki and Montessa. Two weeks later we had the event, with 150 riders and factory displays and representatives. It was a great success. A week later AVCO denied our request on the grounds that it would disrupt the community. Such shenanigans would be unthinkable in today's litigious climate! The club and their events prospered until civilization killed them.



Photo: Dave Norton

When the proverbial (and actual) dust had cleared and my last motocross race was run (total probably less than 20), that first surprise win on the 175 at Miramar was to be my only victory. The trophy, a bit tarnished by the years, still holds an honored spot in my office and brings a flood of warm memories 40 years later.

*To be continued...*



## Part Eight: XL-Toofty

*Last time Dave bought his first Yamaha and won his first Motocross...*

One of the advantages of the Yamaha 175 Enduro was the inherent simplicity of the two-stroke single. This factor saved me a very long walk one summer day riding solo on the remote fire road from Pine Cove, CA, (near Idyllwild) to Hemet. About halfway down the motor broke a ring and rattled to a stop. Using the three-piece tool kit I pulled the head and cylinder, removed the bits of broken piston ring, reassembled with the single remaining ring and pattered on home.

By this time the 175 had taught me about all it was going to, and saw my first Honda XL-250 ("XL-Toofty"). It was the first modern four-stroke motorcycle, the first mass-produced bike with four valves per cylinder. Now that was a beautiful machine! The traditionally simple classic shapes of aluminum fenders were replaced by dent-resistant sinuously sculpted plastic in metallic silver with tasteful red pinstriping. This four-stroke thumper had a ton of bottom-end grunt and a well-muffled growl, much more refined than the 175 Yamaha Enduros.



Photo: American Honda Motor Co.

The XL-Toofty and I ran a few more local motocross races, the first one in the rain at Miramar. I dropped the street gear and mounted Pirelli Trials Universal tires. There was a strong pull up a steep hill on the course. That hill became an inclined parody of the mud hole at Elsinore in *On Any Sunday*. On the first lap I hit the hill, slithered to a

stop halfway up, *wussed* out and went around. On succeeding laps I hit it at higher speed each time, making it a bit farther on each try. On the last lap I managed by Herculean effort to make the top, running alongside for the last bit, to the cheers of the few hardy spectators.

That race, and the few to follow, underlined the bike's main fault: too heavy, at 288 pounds. The biggest removable item was the exhaust system. Based on experience with my Honda Benly 150 twin, I replaced it with a downtube and straight pipe. It made a hell of a racket but didn't seem to improve on the 24 rear wheel horsepower.

I longed for the lightness and instant throttle response of the two-stroke Yamahas. At one point I test rode a Bultaco Campera at a dealer on Main St. in Santa Ana. Being unfamiliar with the European bikes somewhat scrambled control layout (brake pedal left, shifter right), I cooled it, motoring through town in second. All was fine until I hit a pothole. The dangling throttle cable housing jumped out of its hole and gave me Unintended Acceleration, in spades! I reflexively hit the brake pedal ... uh, make that the shifter, upshifting to third with the throttle WFO. I fortunately got it pointed at a passing vacant lot and reeled it in without injury to man nor beast. The salesman and I had a heated discussion!

Meanwhile, I borrowed my father in law's Suzuki Titan 500 twin touring bike complete with saddlebags for a weekend trip and found it surprisingly comfy and plenty fast. Suzuki had done some interesting stuff, like the X6 Hustler 250 with 6 speeds, back in 1965!

Let's see, I started with 50cc, then 65, 125, 150, 160, 175, 250; what's next? The RT3 Yamaha 360 Enduro had been calling to me for some time. I was reluctant to ride one, afraid I would be smitten. I eventually did, and I immediately was. This was to be my last two-wheeled motorcycle, and one of my favorites.

*To be continued...*

## Part 9: A Complete 360!

*When last we left Dave, he returned to Honda with a beautiful and torque-y (but porky) XL-250. Even stripped and piped it wasn't race-worthy, and he was back with Yamaha again...*

The 360 Enduro was a perfect match for me at the time. It had plenty of power for street riding and hill climbing, yet was light enough to toss around on the dirt and haul out of the mud without help. In short order it morphed into a true dual-purpose street/dirt bike, with a minor in desert racing. Mods included Akront aluminum rims, Cheng Shin full knobbies with rim locks, extended swingarm, forward-mounted Curnutt shocks, fork stoker kit, cushy desert seat, Preston Petty fenders and headlight/number plate, longhorn bars, compression brake and Don Vesco plastic desert tank. Those tall dirt knobbies took a bit of getting used to on the street. Wider turns at lower speeds were necessary. It was waltz-me-around-again-Willie as the knobs just walked their way sideways. It was controllable, just different.



Photo: Dave Norton

The Vesco tank was a point of embarrassment for me. I worked for Steam Power Systems (later to be Dutcher Industries) building a prototype steam car in San Diego. We approached Vesco to do some plastic work for us, and talked him into donating one of his new desert gas tanks for my current XL250 in order to evaluate the rotary-

molding technique and materials Vesco used. The tank sat unused for a year. When I got the RT3 I returned the tank to a local dealer. I said I'd bought the wrong Vesco tank and would like to swap it out. They did, but commented that it was "odd" that I'd managed to buy a prototype test tank that was never sold. Very embarrassed, I admitted I worked for the company Vesco had given the tank to a year earlier for engineering evaluation. *Oops.*

By this time the local motocross scene had gotten a bit more competitive, and I had no chance to finish higher than mid-field against the "real" racing bikes and racers. Racing at Carlsbad put me in mind of a quote from *A Band of Brothers*: when asked by his grandson if he was a hero, one of the surviving warriors responded "No, but I served in the company of heroes." Well, I rode in the company of racers.

The bike was really set up more for desert than motocross, and I was itching to try. The opportunity came when our welder mentioned that his brother was helping lay out and mark the course for a desert race near the Mexican border the following weekend, and we could stay with them. I got my entry in and helped mark the course all day Saturday. Sunday morning there were a couple of hundred riders practicing the run to the smoke bomb when we got word that one of the experienced racers had hit a soft spot, gone off big time, broke his neck and died at the scene. We gathered everyone, cancelled the race, passed the hat and gathered a few hundred dollars for the widow. It was a freak accident, but it did underscore the inherent danger. My desert riding continued, but I never tried racing again.  
*To be continued...*

## Part 10: The End of the Beginning

*Last time Dave had moved up to a Yamaha 360 Enduro and modified it as a street-legal desert racer...*

My riding buddy Terry's (not his real name) family and my family spent Thanksgiving Weekend in '78 camped out at Devils Playground, an area of desert sand dunes off the highway between Barstow and Baker in the Mojave Desert. This was in a time before the open desert areas in Southern California became overrun with motorhomes and toy haulers full of beer-guzzling desert rats, bikes and buggies. Terry had a new Suzuki RM370, I my Yamaha 360 Enduro set up for desert.



Photo: [motorbike-search-engine.co.uk](http://motorbike-search-engine.co.uk)



Photo: Dave Norton

We pulled the bikes off the trailer, suited up, mounted up, ready for the first ride. Key on, gas on, kill switch off, choke on: *kickity. Kickity. Kickity-kickity-kickity-kickity nothing.* Check everything, all OK. Gimme a push Terry! *Push-push-push-push rrrrrmmmp.* No fire. Must be flooded, or fouled. Pull the plug, its wet. New plug. Repeat all the above.

All right, time for Drastic Measures. Wrap a tow strap around the bar brace a few times, hold on to the tag end. Other end tied to the truck. Get rolling, 15 mph, drop clutch in third: *rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.* Nothing. Run it up to 30. Drop the clutch: *rrrrrrwaaaaaAAAAAAAAEEEEEEEE!* I'm now WFO at 30 mph 10 feet behind a truck with a rope around my handlebar! I honestly don't remember what happened next, but I found myself on my back in the sand next to my screaming bike! Hit the kill switch. Check for damage. All's OK. What the hell happened? The tiedown in the truck had pulled the throttle cable housing out of its hole (sound familiar?) leaving the throttle WFO.

With the drama out of the way, we spent a delightful two days playing Steve, Mert and Malcolm out on the sand. My son Christopher got his intro into dirt riding, at a suitably sedate rate, in my lap.



Photo: Dave Norton

Chris is now a Suit, working for the VA, enjoying his Triumph 750 triple, waiting to find just the right Norton Commando he wants.

Terry and I were back at Devil's Playground on Thanksgiving Weekend again in '79, thankfully without my son. We were returning to camp on the winding dirt road from the dunes, play-racing. I was the more experienced rider; his RM370 was the faster bike. My front tire had punctured and he was leading. Terry was blind in one eye. Entering a blind turn on his blind side, Terry struck a dune buggy head on with a closing speed of probably 50 mph. He went over the bars and landed in the dirt, flat on his back. I ran up and found him conscious, both legs badly mangled, one torn off but for a bit of thigh and pumping blood. I used my wadded-up shirt pressed against the stump to slow the loss of blood.

The buggy driver was unhurt, and drove to camp for help. In minutes, or was it hours, we had a pickup truck, several guys, boards and tape for splints, and radio contact with the San Bernardino County Sherriff. Winds were too high for a LifeFlight evacuation. We loaded Terry into the pickup, drove most of the 20+ miles out on the dirt road, and transferred him to an ambulance ride to Barstow Urgent Care. They got him stable for the longer ride to Loma Linda Medical Center. By the time we got him to a hospital bed it was six hours since he hit the ground. We nearly lost him twice during that time.



Photo: Dave Norton

I loved motorcycles for 20 years. I still did after the accident, and I still do today. But I can no longer take the unbridled joy I used to in pushing a dirt bike to its limits and occasionally beyond. The pleasure derived is simply no longer worth the pain of remembrance. I'd like to say that Terry recovered, that they saved his legs, that he was able to live a normal life once again. Much as I would like to, I can't. He fought a lingering infection that finally forced amputation several years after the accident. He couldn't take it. He lost his marriage, his job, his home, his self-worth, all that was dear to him.

My beloved 360 Enduro moved on to another lucky (I hope) rider for \$550. It would take another three years of soul-searching, dreaming, sketching, reading, researching, designing, drawing and building before I had my response to this tragedy.

*To be continued...*

## Part 11: Yikes! Shrikes!

*Dave's motorcycling life (at least on two wheels) ended with a tragic crash in last month's segment, and we left him working on an alternative...*

Once it became apparent that I could no longer accept the risks inherent in motorcycling, I set out to design a vehicle that would provide most of the appeal of two wheels and a motor with a more protective cage for the driver/passenger. It would be street legal, light, small, with good performance and excellent handling. The SCCA class H-Modified sports racing car Russ and I had built in '65...



Photographer unknown, photo courtesy of Jerry Pacheco



...was a step towards what I wanted. It soon became apparent that a three-wheeled layout had the advantage of eliminating many costly, heavy, and design-intensive elements (safety glass windshield, wipers, defroster, bumpers etc.). Using a production drivetrain and selected components would help also.

An aluminum monocoque structure always appealed to me, and I laid out a 1F2R (one front wheel, two rear) configuration using Honda Civic power.

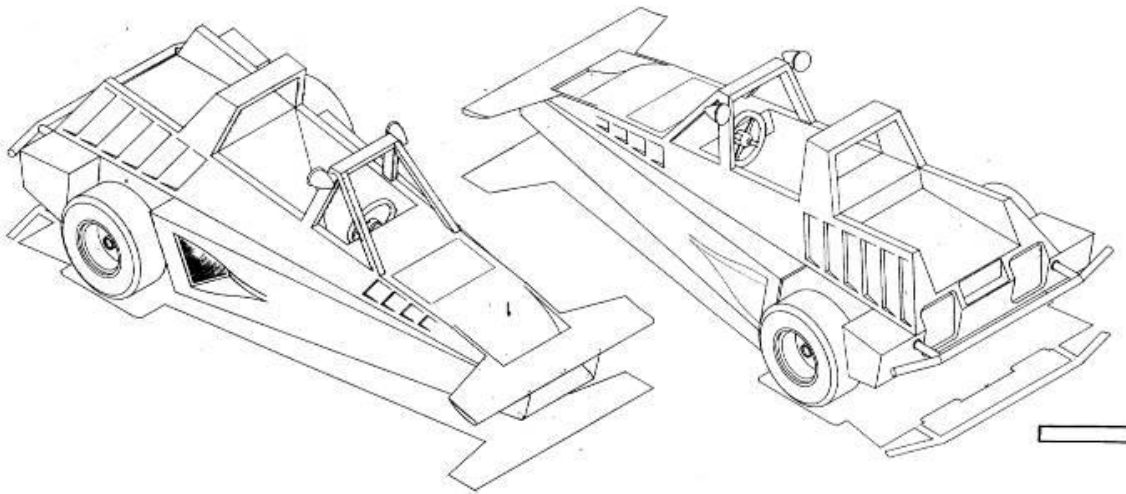
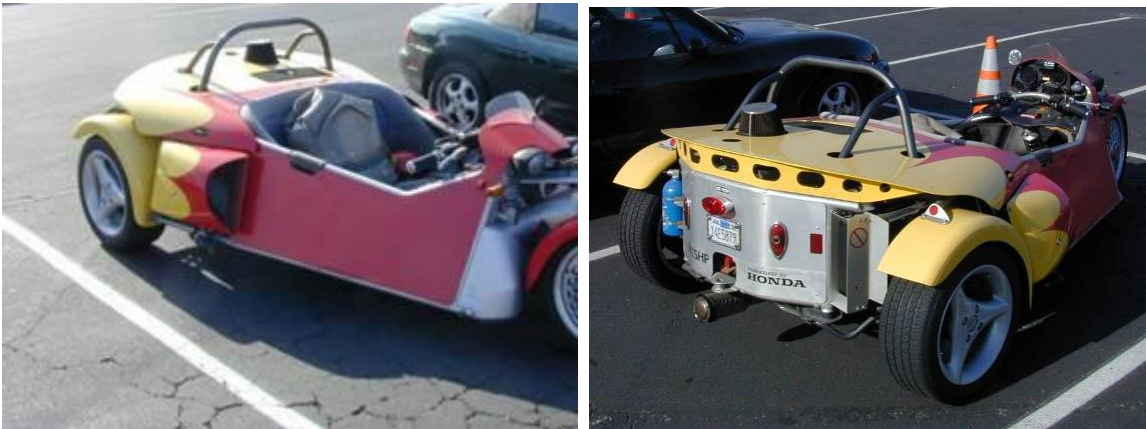


Image: Dave Norton

I saw something quite similar a few years later at the Knott's Kit Car Show.



Photos: Dave Norton

Calculations of CG (center of gravity) location and overturning resistance led me to adopt a 2F1R layout, and by '80 I had the basics down:

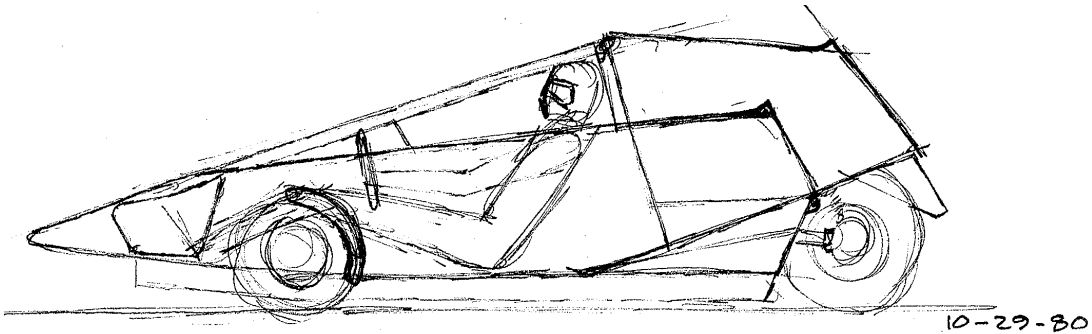
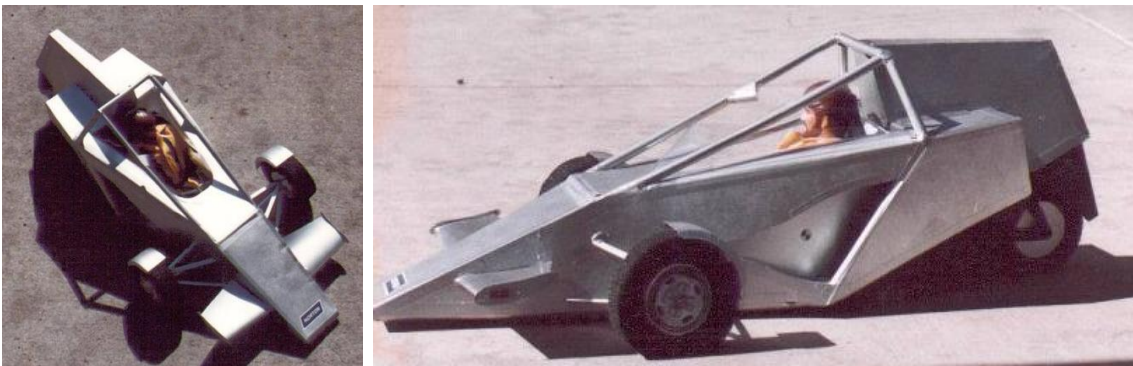


Image: Dave Norton

A paper model with G.I. Joe at the wheel fleshed out the concept:



An SAE Technical Paper followed, presented in '83, with Honda CX-500 power.

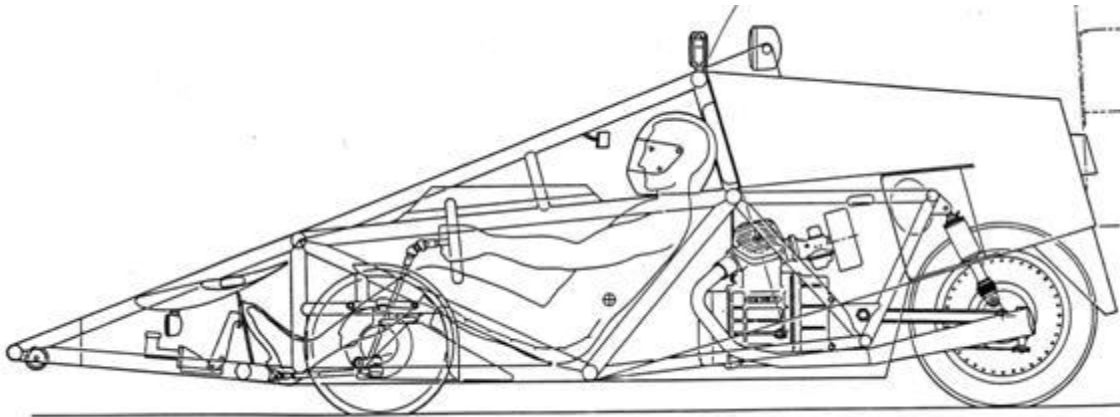


Image: Dave Norton

The prototype was completed in '83 using a Yamaha 650 Maxim drive package, at a total cost of \$5,000.



The first week driving the Shrike from San Diego to work in Temecula, I stopped for gas. An off-duty CHP officer came by and we chatted for a while. Two weeks later I was running late, doing 70+ (55 max at the time) when I noted a black and white closing FAST one lane over. That's it, I'm had. The CHP car pulled along side and looked over at me. The officer reached down for his mic, turned on the outside speaker and said "Good morning, Dave." He had read the name on my helmet weeks before! . I gave a "Ya got me!" shrug. He said "You're cool." and went on ahead in search of bad guys. I moderated my velocity after that.

During the years the Shrike was on the road without bodywork I was occasionally stopped by the local constabulary. Usually, they were merely curious and wanted to check it out up close and make sure it was legally registered. On two occasions, one a Riverside County Sherriff and the other a lady CHP officer, the attitude was different. This was their apparent thought process:

1. It has three wheels. Therefore
2. It's unsafe.
3. It must be illegal.
4. Let's get you off the road before you hurt somebody.

On both occasions the officer spent at least 10 minutes trying to find out what it was that did not conform to the California Vehicle Code and cite me. Both conversations went something like this:

Officer: You realize Mr. Norton that this vehicle is illegal.

Me: Oh? What is it that's not legal, I'll fix it right away.

Officer: For one, it's too low.

Me: The Vehicle Code says no portion of the vehicle can be lower than the lowest point of the wheel rim, which is 2-3/4". Ground clearance is 3-1/2".

Officer: Hmmm. The headlight is too high.

Me: Well, the Vehicle Code says a maximum of 54". Mine measures 52-3/4", we can check it if you wish, I have a tape measure.

Officer: But you can't have the headlight behind the front wheel like that.

Me: You do realize this is a motorcycle, and most motorcycles do have the light behind the front wheel.

Officer: You don't even have a real windshield or wipers!

Me: Again, this is a motorcycle.

The conversations continued until the officer got frustrated. The lady CHP officer turned on her heel, stomped back to her cruiser, got in, slammed the door and patched off leaving two long black lines following her re-entry to the freeway. The County Sherriff told me he'd check the book that night, find out what it was that was not in conformance, and that we would have this conversation again another day. We never did. The kicker to all this was that I knew something they didn't. Neither one noticed the lack of front fenders, which are required! To this day the Shrike remains *sans* front fenders.

There was a related incident many years later after our move to Oregon. A friendly local lady police officer stopped me one day. Her first remark was "You know you need front fenders on this." I figured the jig was up, now I'd finally have to add some properly engineered fenders. After checking my paperwork she asked if she could take a photo of the Shrike to put up "at work" so the other officers were aware of the car. Sure. She did, and then I asked her if she would mind taking a photo with my camera of the Shrike with her cruiser behind, red lights flashing. She happily took my picture, returned my camera, said "Have a nice day" and returned to her duties.



But I'm getting way ahead of the story.  
*To be continued...*

## Part 12: Shrike 2!

*Last month Dave told how a horrible crash led to the design and construction of the Norton Shrike...*

The Shrike and I drove 78,000 miles in this configuration, without bodywork, until the motor went BANG at the top of second gear on a freeway onramp. A period of storage (along with a divorce and change of employment) ended in 2000 when a crashed BMW K1200RS with 8,200 miles on the clock became available. I decided to explore the upper end of the performance envelope, and began design and reconstruction. Off came everything aft of the firewall, the "new" bike was stripped of un-needed hardware and moved into place, and connecting structure was made.



Photo: Dave Norton

It was at that point that, as sometimes happens, "life got in the way".

Construction of the BMW refit for the Shrike was well underway in October 2000 when wife Ellie and I took our annual backpacking adventure in Yosemite. At 8,500 feet altitude, 6 trail miles from Tuolumne Meadows, I had a generalized *gran mal* seizure. No previous symptoms or family history. A LifeFlight chopper ride to Mammoth Lake then Reno got me to an MRI and CAT scan, where they diagnosed a cryptic cavernous malformation in my brain: a knot of blood vessels that decided to bleed out. Treatment comprised a daily dose of Dilantin, to continue indefinitely.



Photo: Ellie Gregory

Fortunately, I tolerated (and still do) the medication well, after several weeks of comparative lethargy. I eased back into the Shrike project by creating an AutoCAD layout of the new version:

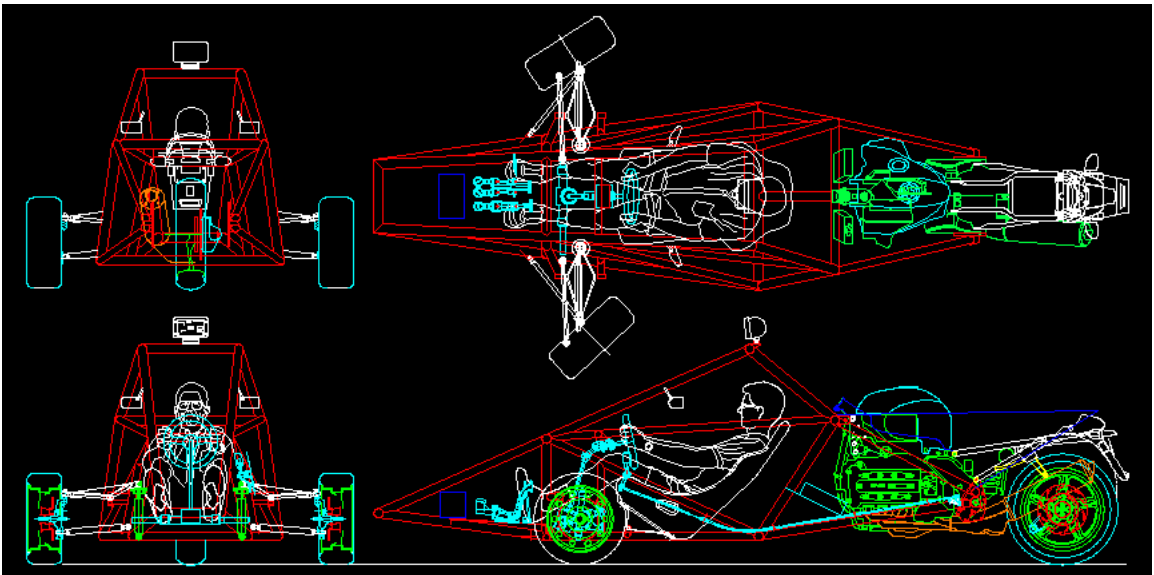
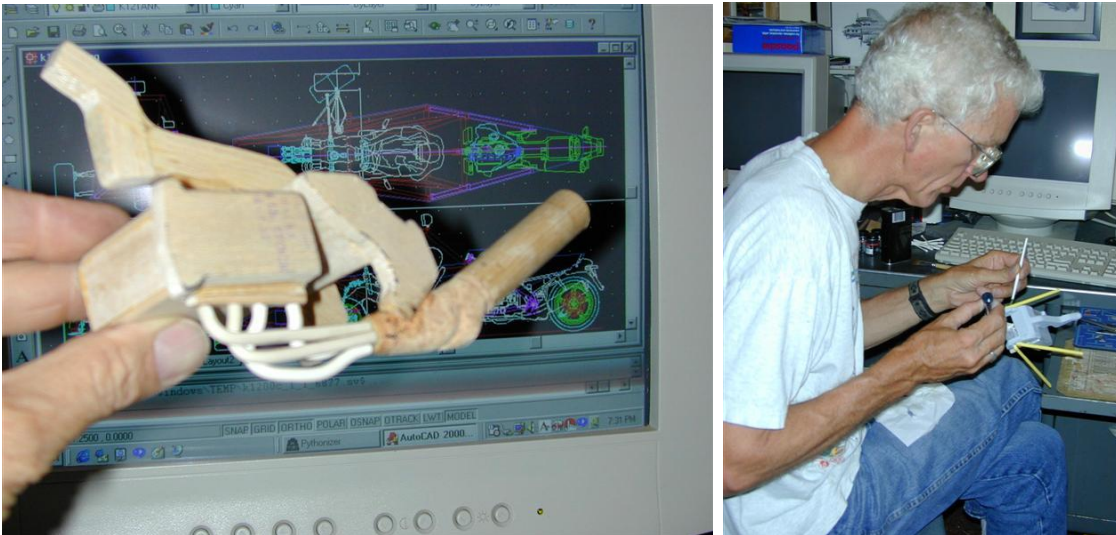


Image: Dave Norton

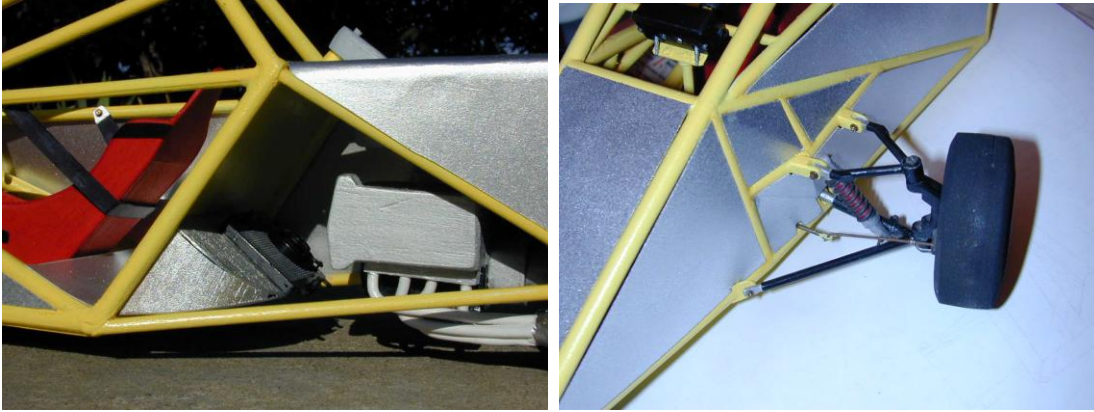
Work also continued on a second scale model, used to work out the shape of the bodywork:



I found it easier to work with AutoCAD and balsa wood than metal during this time...







Photos: Dave Norton

After a six-month hiatus during which my brain reconstructed its burnt-out wiring, construction on Shrike 2 continued. All my attempts to get the motor running, once installed, were unsuccessful, and for another six months I worked around the problem. At the end, when everything else was done and it just HAD to work, I connected the battery once again, said a little prayer and hit the switch. My relief was indescribable as it immediately settled into an even idle. No trace of the problem (either Shrike-wise or brain-wise) has surfaced since.

By July '03 Shrike 2 was on the road again:



Photo: Ellie Gregory

The bump in power from 65 to 130 changed the character of the car "substantially". With 65 hp I could toss it about freely at full chat, with a minimum of concern over rear traction. With 130 hp, driving became a much more serious endeavor, demanding constant attention to the very real potential connection between my right foot and oblivion. But ooooooh, the power! There are times when too much power is just enough.

With the new powerplant came a semi-enclosed body. The combination of reduced aerodynamic drag and an engine that was just loafing along most of the time produced essentially the same fuel consumption as before, around 36 mpg in town. The enclosed engine space created a cooling problem. The two air inlets didn't provide sufficient airflow through the twin BMW coolant radiators until I made three changes: the radiators were moved down close to the inlet, scoops were added to grab more air, and screened air outlets were added to get the air out again. The large oil cooler used with the Yamaha setup remained. All three coolers have individual fans.

During development of the cooling system we ran an SCCA Solo II autocross to evaluate performance on a tight twisting closed course. I was surprised and a bit disappointed with the results. Acceleration out of the turns is limited by the limited rear wheel traction. In steady-state cornering we could hold .9G, but couldn't "hook up" exiting turns.



Photo: Dave Norton

A later Track Day event at the Streets of Willow course at Willow Springs Raceway in Mojave showed similar results. On these events passing was allowed only on the straights, and with 10 pounds per horsepower we were very hard to pass! We could just top 100 mph on the front straight.



Photo: Kurt Bilinski

An incident on the road vindicated one aspect of the Shrike's design. The rear disc brake locked under hard braking at about 65 mph, resulting in a slow 180° half spin off into the weeds. True to my earlier calculations we didn't overturn. A later recurrence of a locked rear resulted in a rebuilt caliper and the realization that the spin wasn't due to pilot error.

*To be continued...*

## Part 13: Show Time!

*When last we left Dave, the Norton Shrike had received a heart transplant in the form of a BMW K1200RS, increasing power from 60 to 130 hp...*

After seven years on the road with Shrike II, we have covered 55,000 more miles, entered 27 car/bike shows (earning 12 awards including one Best of Show), half a dozen parades, an SCCA Solo II Autocross, a drag race and a Track Day at Willow Springs. The Shrike is usually "not the droid they're looking for", being neither fish nor fowl: neither a car at a bike show or a motorcycle at a car show. There *are* times

when its unique concept, low budget construction, and blend of high performance and low fuel consumption catch the judge's eye.

Our second year at the Knott's 2-day Kit Car Show in May of '04 was a wet one. Less than half the cars showed up the second day due to the rain. On Sunday morning I drove in past the sheltered judge's booth in pouring rain, obviously soaked to the gills, to a standing ovation by the judges. At the award ceremony we won Second Place behind a mega-dollar Lamborghini clone that also won Best of Show. The accepted behavior at these events is to accept one's award with casual coolness. When my name was called I whooped and did a jig. I overheard one of the judges say "I *like* that guy."



Rain was a factor at the Spring Temecula Rod Run in '04 as well:



Photo: Dave Norton

Shrike and I had an especially enjoyable day at the Big Bike Weekend in Redding in '09:



Photo: Dave Norton

There was a professional photographer doing a shoot with three cheesecake models and a chopper. When they finished, the girls came over and asked if they could use the Shrike for a shoot. We did, and had a great time:



Photos courtesy Dave Norton, photographer unknown

Over the years I get the biggest kick out of hoiking kids in and out of the Shrike at shows so Mom and Dad could take their picture:



Photos: Dave Norton

I have to believe that, some day, some guy or gal will use that memory in deciding to do something odd and interesting as well. My own memories of riding in the side hack on Dad's '55 Harley FLH (felt just like a fighter cockpit) and driving the H-Modified and Lotus formula 3 cars weighed heavily in the design process.

Looking back on the Shrike project, I find it has exceeded my expectations. My initial intent was to recapture most of the fun of motorcycling but with increased safety, with a vehicle that would outlast my ability to drive. It has done that, but along the way it has become my alter-ego. I have become it, and it is me. The Shrike has become the perfect expression of who I am. I tell folks I'll drive it until it dies or I die, and I hope the two are not coincident.

My parting shot is directed to any youngster with a keen interest in things mechanical. Study hard, become an engineer, and build your *own* dream. It's SO worth it!

And that, dear reader, about sums it up. We have, at long last, come to...



The End!

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