

© Norton

# NORTON MATCHLESS

and



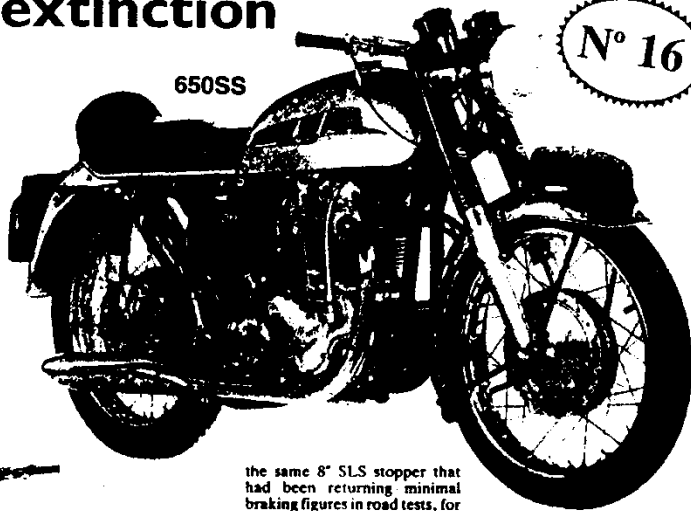
## were saved from extinction

BY the mid-Sixties, the dead hand had firmly grasped ahold of the neck of the Associated Motor Cycles empire, notwithstanding the many famous marque names and models that lay within its portfolio.

The world was changing fast, but down in the AMC headquarters in London SE18, the game was already up: they had failed to either direct the buying public into following their idea of a motorcycling future, or alternatively, to follow-on where the buyers were determined to head.

All so much so that, by early 1966 the company was broke and any goodwill that still attached to the AJS, Matchless, Norton, Francis-Barnett and James marques, was for sale to anyone who felt they could take on the challenge.

Well, recorded history tells us that it was the industrial



650SS

N° 16



G80CS

the same 8" SLS stopper that had been returning minimal braking figures in road tests, for a decade past. Real good lookers, both.

From Matchless, the G80CS single was back, 497cc of thumping all-alloy OHV single in the brazed and bolted duplex CS frame. Plumstead designed "Teledraulic" forks and wheel hubs were on this bike, along with a nearside mounted oil tank, "works" type flat air-filter, Lucas Comp Mag, 19" wheels shod with off-road tyres, full lighting set and a man-sized 32" seat height.

Just 2 gallons of petrol filled the cherry red coloured tank to the brim. For those won over by the off-road styling of the G80CS, but who looked for twin cylinder power, or perhaps

reminded buyers that the days of blurred-identities were certainly not past, but the move was understandable, after all, dead stock had to be shifted and the overall presentation of the P11 was certainly good.

That it was aimed right at the US market, was evidenced by the catalogue's pointed reference to the engine's 45.5 cu in capacity, obtained from bore and stroke dimensions of 2.88" x 3.5" and, the candy apple red tank, that held 2.7 USA gallons. All the bikes featured the then new Amal Concentric carburettors. For the first time and with 12 volt lighting, represented a serious attempt

group, Manganese Bronze, already owners of the Villiers proprietary engine makers, that assumed the AMC mantle, adopted the name Norton-Villiers Ltd and attempted to rebuild the business.

They very soon had a rejuvenated Norton twin on the drawing board, one that was to prove a winner over the following decade; but what to do in the meantime, to see things through?

AMC had hastened their demise, in the eyes of many enthusiasts, by mixing components from the various marques in the three or four years before the collapse. Identities had been blurred, especially where the big four-stroke models were concerned but, to be brutally honest, it was only in the beefy 4-stroke twins, that any hope lay, of salvation with the existing designs. So, the out-classed Francis-Barnett and James two-stroke ranges were ditched for all time (and along with them, the thousands of pounds invested in new engine design less than ten years before).

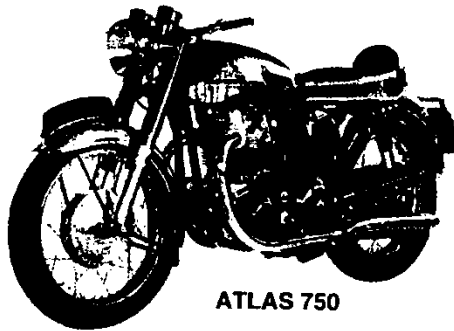
Also out were the lightweight 4-strokes from AJS, Matchless and Norton, leaving nothing below 500cc and while the AJS/Matchless big twins (with Norton engines, forks and brakes) were retained, it was only a few months before the AJS line was

dropped; the name appearing again later of course, on the competition two-strokes that were to be developed around Villiers engine/gear units.

What remained was spruced up and new catalogues printed, to make an appeal to the traditional British big bike buyer, all thoughts of attracting the Learner market having gone with the lightweights. Looking back now, those 1967 offerings from what was styled the Norton-Matchless Division of Norton Villiers Ltd, look pretty fine machines; no, that's being mealy-mouthed, they really must be all-time "classics".

Some cross-breeding was still apparent, but from the true Norton stable, there was the 650SS and the Atlas 750, both in the famed Featherbed frame, naturally! Jet black paintwork for both, with only the silver petrol tank and 300x19/3.50x19 tyre sizes, to distinguish the 650SS, from its cherry red tanked bigger brother, which wore 3.25x19/400x18 rubber, front and rear.

Bracebridge Street "Roadholders" graced the front end, with braking handled by



ATLAS 750

simply "more cubes". Norton-Matchless trotted out the Norton P11.

At first glance, this was the G80CS by another name, but look more closely and the lightweight, chrome-moly, six-bronze welded frame of the late Messrs AMC's last fling G85CS Scrambler, was in evidence. Plumstead forks and hubs

to stay in the market, until better times came.

The London, Earls Court, Show in September of 1967 was to prove that Norton-Villiers meant business alright; they stole the scene with a silver-sheen beauty that had the crowds enthusing British, for the first time in years. The bike fetched an old AMC model name too, James last using it in the mid-Fifties on a two-stroke Trialster - Commando!

As the makers said, about their new creation - "We're not using up this space to boast about the new Norton; we're not going to talk about "most exciting", "fastest". We're not even going to say it's better than all the others - anybody can say that. We're just going to ask you to take a long hard look at the new Norton machine and find out for yourself."

Lot's did take a hard look and plenty bought. The old machines had done their job in seeing Norton-Villiers through a critical time and were soon to be dropped, as life and motor-cycling moved into the 1970s.

