



SKIN DEEP

Jonathan Jones tested a beautifully original 1946 Matchless G80L. Photography: John Overton



Siema,
Malia.

Dear Jonathan,

December 1991

You will be most welcome to ride my Matchless when you visit Malta in January. Perhaps it would be helpful if I tell you something about the motor cycle — one of the first civilian machines to be imported after the war — and how I acquired it.

There were many British motor cycles on the island when I was a child. My father was friends with a soldier who used to visit us on WD 85A M20, in fact I still have a picture of me sitting on it, wearing a tin helmet.

I didn't begin motor cycling until I was 40, learning on a modern bike. But I always wanted a more straightforward and longer lasting machine. A colleague told me about the motor cycle that his uncle had left him 20 years before, and I went to see it in his garage. It stood under a good make, though it was too rusty and dirty. I knew that Matchless was in fine condition it was in.

The bearings were perfect, and I only had to replace the perished electrical wiring and fit a few bolts. I added a proper spring saddle in place of the home-made, wooden one, but otherwise it is in original condition. I have now almost doubled the 10,000 miles that was on the speedometer when I bought it, and am very pleased with it. You can judge for yourself when you visit us.

With best wishes,

Francis
Francis Galea



Red lines were painted on the mudguards and front number plate by the original Maltese dealer, who thought the 500cc Matchless needed brightening up to attract a customer.



Hydraulically damped Teledraulic forks were introduced on the military 350cc G3L in 1941 and were an immediate hit with the British forces.



The Classic Motor Cycle,
Peterborough.

February 1992

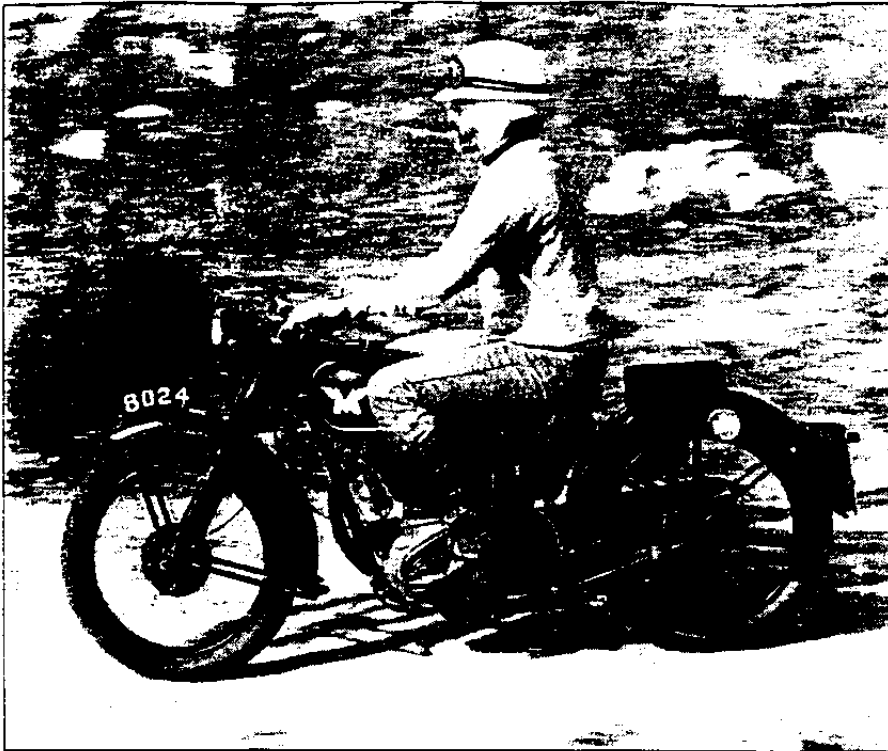
Dear Francis,

I'm sorry that there was no time to discuss your G80L after I had ridden it last week, but you obviously had more important things to think about. I hope that the rescue of your son, John went without a hitch. If you haven't already found a solution to the James Captain's sparklessness, I recommend the coil rewind which

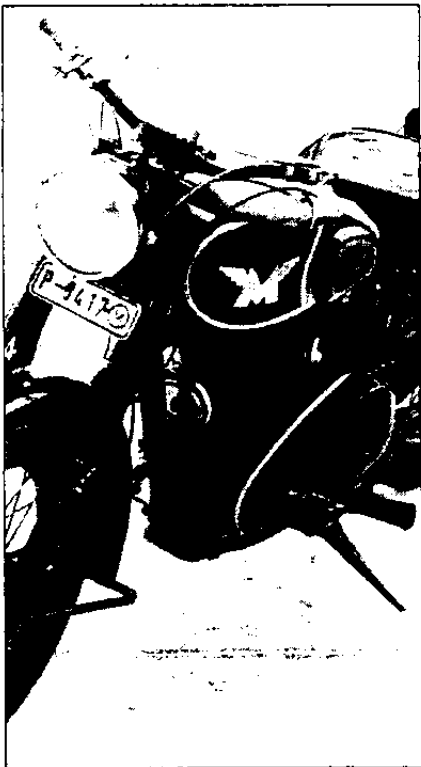
we featured in our July 1990 issue.

I try to be honest about the machines I test, so I have to say that I felt the mechanical condition of the Matchless matched its looks precisely: Very interesting, very original but past its production line best.

If I was restoring a similar model, yours is undoubtedly the machine I would take as an example: nothing has been altered, nothing bodged or repainted, and there is no extra chrome or lily-gilding of any kind. But surely originality and mechanical



Francis Galea enjoys leading his friends off the beaten track on club runs. He keeps the Matchless looking good by wiping it over with a mixture of oil and paraffin.



Above: When found, the Matchless had a crude wooden seat, one of the few departures from standard in 19,000 miles. Francis fitted the sprung saddle.

Left: Primary chaincase holds its quota of oil, but after the clutch has been rebuilt will need careful assembly to ensure it stays there.

health aren't mutually exclusive.

I freed the plates with a kick, clutch lever in to the bar, but when I'd started the motor, first gear went in with such a thump that I feared I might plough through the Marsaxlokk fish market, before I had time to grab the decompressor.

The free-play seems right — the book says about 1/32in at the gearbox lever — so I guess that the plates aren't pulling off square, either because the springs are maladjusted, or perhaps due to

wear where the tongues locate in the clutch basket. I detected a bit of slip too, and if they aren't already fitted, I recommend using cork linings for the wet Burman clutch. The woven Ferodo plates can be temperamental in oil.

The transmission is ultra smooth, no doubt due to the efficient engine shaft shock absorber. And I can't remember riding a more tractable 500cc single, yet one with so much life. Carburation is clean and faultless, and the motor has just the

right amount of urge, without a trace of harshness. It's mechanically quiet too, but then it's barely into its prime, with 19,000 miles on the working parts. Some areas of Malta seem similarly unchanged, since the days when they first reverberated to that gutsy exhaust note 45 years ago; like the road to Tarxien, where I was riding when we lost all compression, and the engine died.

You'd warned me not to push it too hard, and believe me when I say that I wasn't mistreating the Matchless. The rest of the motor still had plenty in store when the valve seized. A thorough flooding of the carburettor and two kicks soon cooled things enough to free the stem.

There are three areas to check, firstly that the valve is not bent — spinning it in a lathe should soon show you — secondly that you are not over-oiling the top end, which can encourage carbon build-up.

Oil fed to the rocker spindles is non-adjustable, but the regulating screw for the inlet valve should be between 1/16th and 1/2 a turn open. On pre-1949 models such as yours, lubricant collects in a well, formed by the rocker adjustment chamber. This puddle can also cause smoking on start-up, particularly if the side stand is used, and the manual suggests drilling a 1/16in diameter hole in each side of the well, allowing excess oil to drain into the pushrod cover tubes.

Finally, make sure that your tappet clearance is set to the recommended 'nil when hot'. If the pushrods are not free to revolve, the valve may be held slightly off its seat, preventing the passage of heat to the head, and increasing the build-up of carbon.

I took things easier then, and had no more trouble, though a clutch which is unwilling to separate is a pain in the traffic. Fortunately the G80L's handling allowed me to take avoiding action, when stopping was impractical. The Teledraulic forks and rigid frame make a surprisingly effective combination; just enough suspension for reasonable comfort over that endless pothole that you insisted on referring to as the road, with the tautness of a whip-free, rigid frame. Poking the Matchless into the non-existent gap between a maniac Morris and a big green bus presented no problem.

Please don't take offence at my criticisms, but my encounter with your long lasting Matchless convinced me what a fine riding machine there is trying to escape from that original shell. Set aside a weekend, and with the help of your friends from the Historic Motorcycle Club, I'm sure you'll get even more pleasure from those Saturday runs.

Happy spannering!

Jonathan
Jonathan.