

The Rickman Matchless is a sliding fool. In any gear, at almost any rpm, just lean it over and wick it on.

# MATCHLESS

# METISSE

500 CC OF TORQUE...

Not too many years ago, a big Matchless single was considered one of the hot machines in motocross and scrambles. When the four-stroke was king, the strong-pulling singles plowed great swaths through the desert on their way to wins and trophies. The contest raged between the slightly lighter Matchboxes and their British cousins, the Triumphs and BSAs. Then came the ring-ding invasion. The first two-strokes in sportsman off-road competition appeared well within the memory of many riders. In these few, relatively short years, the big, torquey four-cycles have progressively faded from the scene almost to the point of disappearing. Two-strokes dominate motocross and

cross-country racing. Now, ring-dings are the rule and a four-stroke the rare exception at most events.

But there is a type of man who resolutely believes in the big thumpers. They have found the machine for them, and are not about to be swept up with any new-fangled nonsense or ear-splitting two-stroke noise. There are, among this band of determined traditionalists, those who actually believe that a well-prepared thumper is still the right machine for the long, arduous 100-mile runs across the desert. This group is regarded, with grudging admiration and wonder, as a little strange by the speed freaks on the Japanese and European machinery. "Wow,

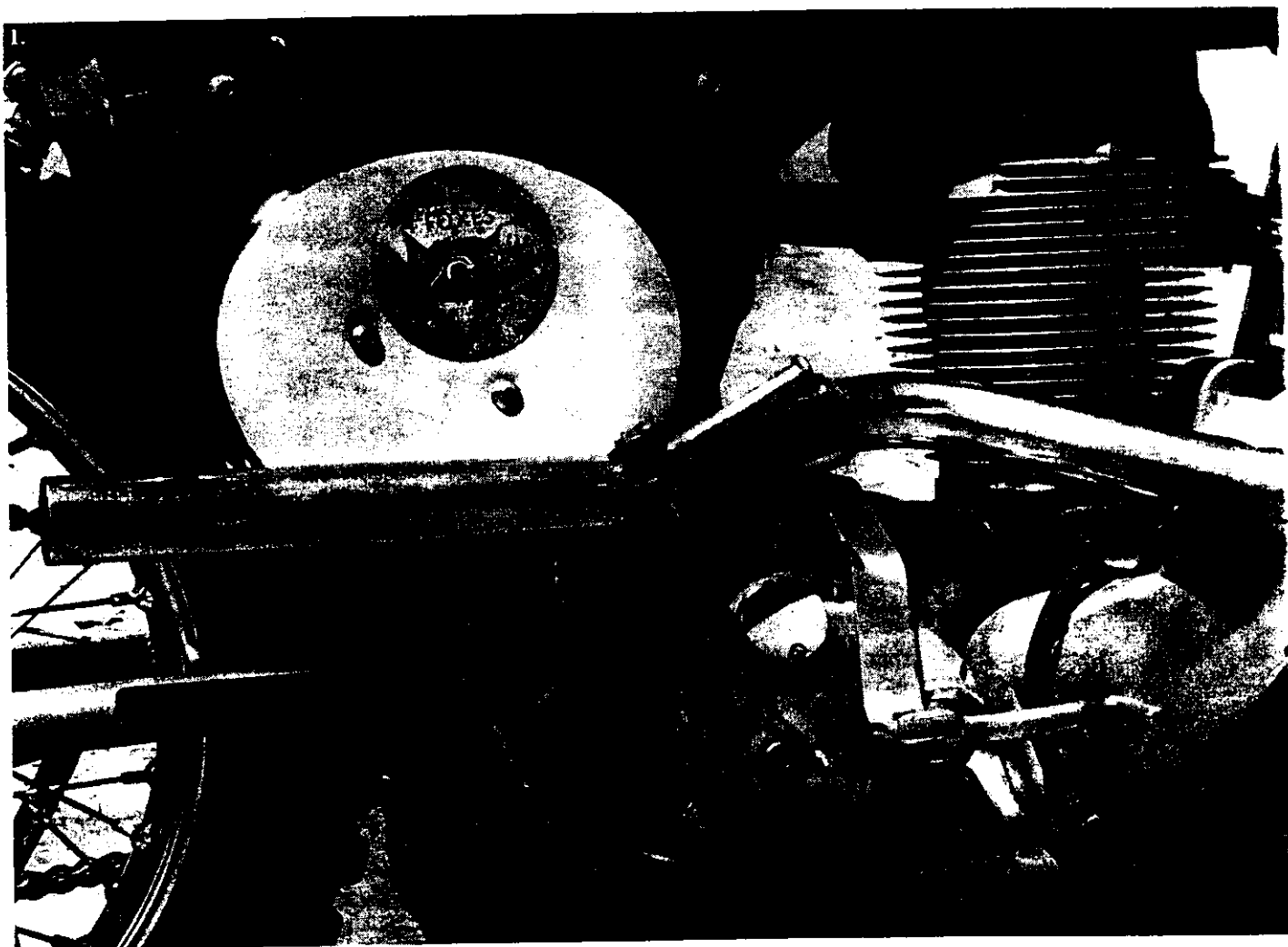
look at that old thing!" is a common reaction. Most people just don't understand.

Among this group of intrepid campaigners, who also tend to run pretty big in physical size (it takes a big man to fling the heavy mounts through the sagebrush—and to discourage all the wise comments about antiques) is Ben Egbert, proud owner and rider of a 500 Matchless G-85 C/S carefully encradled in a Rickman Metisse frame. This machine is one of the last of the classic desert-prepared Matchless Metisse produced by Rickman during the popularity peak of the four stroke specials, around 1965.

Ben's mighty Matchless has a wet weight of 290 pounds, stretched out over a long 57-inch wheelbase. The engine actually displaces 499 cc with an 86mm square bore and stroke. Similarity to the brand new BSA Victor engine is striking, at least in dimensions. Output of the vintage Matchless is around 41 hp at 7000 rpm, and the torque is phenomenal. The pulling power of this thumper, in any gear, is mind-shattering to riders accustomed to a two-stroke power band. The engine is mildly carbureted with a 32mm Amal Concentric, but is running a high 12.5:1 compression ratio. Ben figures the top speed, as geared, is approximately 72 mph.

PLANS FOR THE future include a 21-tooth countershaft sprocket for a higher top end, probably around 85. The Matchless can pull it. The perceptive reader may inquire at this point: What future? How could anybody invest in a dated machine like a Matchless? Ben Egbert earned zero points in 15 desert races while riding one of the hot two-strokes (which he still has and rides). He switched to the Matchless and won points on his very first ride, a 100-mile Hare and Hound. He finished over 70 places better than he had been averaging on his two-stroke. The reason? Loads of torque and less fatigue. He claims he can keep up a faster average speed over a distance of 90 or 100 miles than on a lighter two-stroke.

The Matchless has a certain quality that makes a rider like it. While the two-strokes will occasionally break down out in the middle of nowhere, the Matchless gets you back home no matter how badly it is hurt.



You can figure on finishing.

The nostalgic "old campaigner" appeal of the Matchless is impossible to resist. It has become a personal friend to Ben, compared to his modern two-stroke, which is all cold, hard, efficient racing machine. Plus

it is one hell of a lot of fun to ride. Just wick the throttle in any gear, and you go charging across the terrain in great thumping leaps at a pace that can only be described as a "lope." It feels smooth, almost soft and even slow—until you look to the side and

see the ground as a blur. Straight-line handling in the rough is flat beautiful.

THE BIG SINGLES are notoriously hard starters by reputation. The Matchless isn't . . . unless you are



This mighty Matchless 500, encased in a Rickman chassis, is still garnering points in cross-country competition.

or second kick starts are the rule. The result is a mellow, satisfying rumble.

The sound is no put-on. The Matchless has a well-rounded power band. In any gear, at almost any rpm, just twist the throttle grip and move out. As long as you keep power to the ground through the rear wheel, the 500 can be lugged through almost any miserable combination of sand, mud, etc. It tracks straight as an arrow down sandwashes, as long as you make the engine pull. It will drive through any loose or rutted ground carving its own path.

The bike can also be taken over jumps smoothly. Landing attitude was controllable, and low end power is sufficient to keep the front end up. When taking whoop-de-dooos, you have to stay way back on the saddle, but the ride is as comfortable as any modern racer—better than most.

The front end will wash out when cornering, unless you set up just right and keep the power on. It is necessary to have some drive force through the rear wheel to get through a corner without getting out of shape. If the corner is long enough, the best way through is to slide it; the Matchless Metisse is a sliding fool. In any gear, just crank it over and get on the throttle. The result is great, glorious, rooster-tail slides, whether for fun or profit.

And the sound is prodigious. It's

a sound that may bring tears to the eyes of old-time dirt riders. There is a slow build-up of long-stroking thumps that finally run together as one throaty roar—and you find that you are going very fast.

THE CONTROLS AND bars of Ben's Matchless were in good condition and laid out perfectly for desert racing, the owner's specialty. Clutch and brake operation were fingertip light, yet positive. The Matchless gearbox is excellent. Clutchless shifts seemed natural in most riding situations. The wide, high bars were set up just right. You could slide, turn or tuck in with equal ease. It takes minimal effort to maneuver and handle the machine in cross-country charging. You can ride flat out in fourth without feeling that you're straddling the Disaster Special.

The big 3½ gallon Rickman tank is great for the desert. It didn't force your knees out or your feet off the wide rigid pegs. Plenty of gas for a full race, too. Pit stops would seem to be optional.

Ben plans on adding Curnutt shocks (the Girlings seemed to work fine, however), a Mikuni breathing through a Filtron, and folding pegs. The one thing he can't, and never should, change is the "matchless" torquey feel of a big G-85 single, charging in great smooth leaps across the wide-open desert.

**1.**  
The Matchless G-85 C/S engine displaces an actual 499cc with a square 86mm bore and stroke. Torque produced by the ageless thumper is more than adequate.

**2.**  
The Matchless features a close-coupled fit and more "tucked-in" engine profile.

a lightweight. The more weight on the kick starter, the better. Procedure is to flood the carb without retarding the spark. Kick once just through compression. Come down with one full, solid stroke and watch your shin on the rigid foot peg. First

