

# AJS

550cc JAMPOT

# Buddy can you spare a B

*US competition rider and stuntman Bud Ekins gave a rare 550cc Matchless to Jack Edney, who restored the AMC Jampot as an AJS for Irish rallying/Phillip Tooth*

**T**HE FIRST time I saw Jack Edney's 550c AJS badged twin was in Kenmare in the south west of Ireland. Jack was doing some basic maintenance, attacking the front mud-guard of his immaculate special with a ball pein hammer.

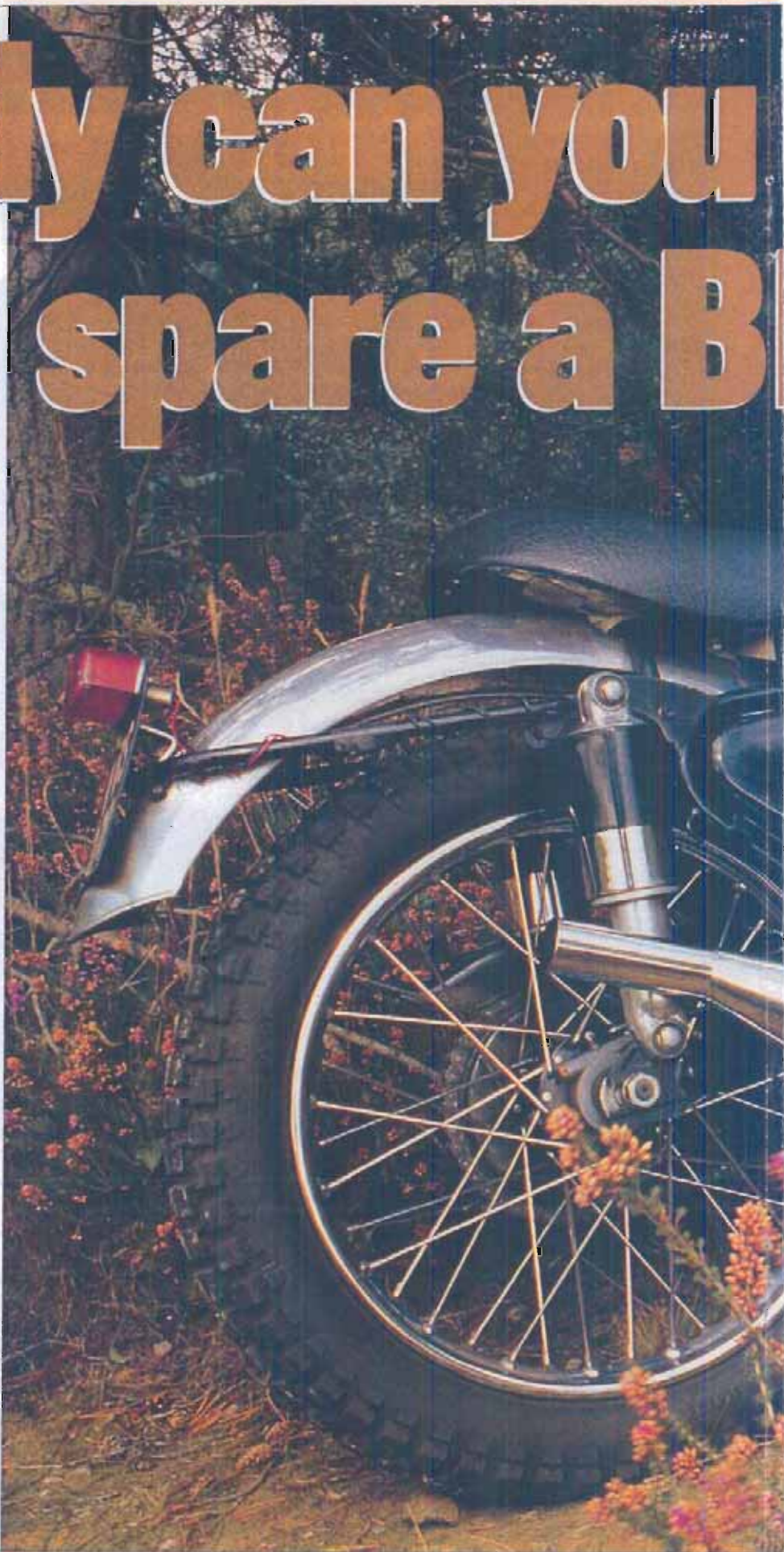
The pattern siamesed exhaust pipes were fouling the guard when the Tele-draulic fork bottomed, restricting steering to dead ahead: not much fun when you're twisting and turning down the Caha mountains. Jack was trying to increase the clearance between pipes and guard when I met him.

'I didn't have any trouble in England,' said Jack as he put down the hammer and picked up a hacksaw. 'But the potholes over here are a lot deeper.'

Jack is a regular competitor in the Irish National rally, and usually rides a 500cc four valve Rudge. It was on the Irish that he struck up a friendship with American film stuntman and former ISDT rider Bud Ekins. And it was during a visit to Bud's Hollywood home that Jack first set eyes on the 1954 Associated Motor Cycles twin languishing in a corner of the workshop. The petrol tank was missing, the seat had rotted away, and in spite of being a Californian bike, the fork shrouds were badly rusted. Chrome was peeling from the rear chain guard, brake plates, and damper units.

'I knew that AMC enlarged their 500cc twin to 600cc, then 650 and finally 745cc to meet the demands of the American market, but I hadn't heard of a 550cc model,' says Jack. 'When Bud saw how interested I was in it, he told me that I could have it. He sent it over with some other bikes he was shipping to England. It didn't cost me a cent. ➤➤➤'

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN OVERTON



# BIKE?



Rusty Matchless G9B was restored in three months to AJS Model 20B splendour

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Even heeled over on a damp road, the trials tyres grip well and never felt as if they were about to give way

'The 550 was originally a Matchless G9B,' Jack continues. 'So the petrol tank should have been chromed with red panels and silver and red pinstripes. I was going to build it up to use in Ireland, so it didn't bother me which tank I got, but Bud gave me a brand new Lyta steel competition petrol tank.'

Jack prefers the AJS colours, so he painted it blue, swapped the Matchless timing chest cover for an AJS-inscribed unit, and made himself a Model 20B Ajay.

As a 1954 bike, the twin was fitted with the full width, light alloy front hub introduced for that year. 'I detest the look of that hub,' says Jack. 'It looks like a cheap saucupan. So Bud dug me out an earlier 7in single sided unit and I spoked that into a new rim.'

Although the Matchless G9B was sold as a roadster with highrise bars, Jack opted to build his twin up as an ISDT-type bike. He used to ride AJS machines in trials in the fifties, and was a keen supporter of AMC and works rider Hugh Viney. Using a photograph of Viney's Ajay as a reference, Jack made up alloy mudguards and commissioned legendary Hants-based frame builder Eric Cheney to make a competition seat similar to those used on the AJS 7R.

In spite of the rust, most of the tinware was sound. To a man like Jack, who once ran his own car body repair shop, the paintwork was a piece of cake. He beat out dents in the chainguard and headlamp shell, and after gritblasting and etch priming, used a gravity feed spray gun to apply two-pack BMW black paint. The petrol tank was finished in Vauxhaul Regatta blue, with Hermetite gold engine paint for the lining. He didn't use a Swallow or a Swan camel hair striping brush like the professionals do: 'I masked up the tank and put the gold paint on with a cheap old brush.'

Dismantling the Jampot suspension units for servicing was not so easy. When the peg spanner failed to shift the aluminium lock rings, Jack had to hammer them off with a steel punch. Replacements came from Hamrax. Each suspen-

sion unit takes 85cc of oil. Official recommendation is SAE20, but Jack uses SAE30. He is impressed with the North Kensington dealer's service: 'Hamrax supplied all the spares I needed: bearings, exchange brake shoes, control cables, a gearchange lever... the only thing they didn't have was the folding kickstart that AMC competition bikes used.'

The engine was still on standard pistons, with no appreciable wear on the bores. The iron barrels were painted with Hermetite engine black, and still look good two years later. Jack even painted the alloy heads with Hermetite engine silver: 'It helps keep the fins clean because road dirt and oil doesn't become ingrained in the alloy,' he says. 'But the silver is beginning to turn yellow now.'

He didn't bother stripping the bottom end. 'I just cleaned the oil filter and blow-off valve, flushed out the crankcase, and bolted it back together.' Bud Ekins was not impressed. 'He told me that I should have done a complete strip down. He was right,' says Jack.

'It takes me about three months to restore a bike. There's nothing to them really. After years of working on MG cars, motorcycles are easy.'

The original Amal Monobloc carburettor appeared to be in good condition, but Jack couldn't get the 550 to tick over reliably. He fitted a Concentric, and now has first kick starting, a clean throttle response, and perfect slow running.

For 1952 AMC introduced a new crankcase pressure release valve — a hollow drive-side crankshaft with a spring loaded flap valve that released pressure into the primary chain-

case. In spite of this development, Jack's 550cc engine had been fitted with a second breather, screwed into the crankcase just below the barrels on the drive side.

After his Irish trip, Jack went over to the Isle of Man for the Manx Grand Prix where he lent the twin to a friend to try it round the TT course. 'He was used to riding an Ariel Square Four,' recalls Jack, 'and I think he was expecting my 550 to perform just as well. He thrashed it' →

## We were neck and neck nearly to the top of the Healey Pass



Jack Edney modified his mudguard to cope with Irish potholes

## Riding impressions

**R**ETARD the ignition, tickle the Concentric until petrol just wets the top of the float chamber, and you can be sure of a one-kick start. Jack is the same height as me, so handlebars and controls are set just as I like them: brake and clutch levers down slightly and in line with my extended fingers, no slack in the throttle cable, and a brake pedal under my toes.

The footrests have been moved back about two inches, using plates bolted between the original attachment points and the centre stand pivot. Two inches may not sound a lot, but it makes a big difference to rider comfort. Feet up and bum on the competition seat, I could swing round in narrow lanes without risk of losing five points. The back brake has plenty of feel, making the Ajay easy to control on tarmac and off road.

What impresses most is how flickable the twin is. It falls into tight bends a little too quickly, encouraging you to cut the corner, but the Jampot Ajay always felt sure of itself, floating over bumps that would have my plunger BSA Star Twin tossing and pitching. Slide back on the seat, tuck your elbows in as tight as you can, and watch the speedometer needle swing towards the 90 mark.

Cruise at 60mph and engine vibration tingles your fingers through the bars. Push through to 70, and the parallel twin smoothes out again. The familiar Burman gearbox is a little slow — you can't rush the changes — and the wide handlebars and trials tyres induce a slight weave as you accelerate to top speed. It looks worse than it feels.

Even heeled over on a damp road, the Siamese block tread 4.00x19in rear tyre grips well and never feels as if it is about to give way. The 2.75x21in Michelin T64 front tyre is an old worn one Jack had lying around the garage.

A slim Lyta fuel tank holds two gallons, enough for 80 miles the way Jack Edney uses the throttle. Frequent stops for petrol puts a big bulge in your travelling time, but that's about the only criticism I have of this bike. For touring in Ireland, where every village has a petrol pump and a pub, a small tank isn't a problem.




# Buddy, can you spare a BIKE?

*continued*

up the Mountain, the extra breather blew out, and the engine lost all its oil.'

That finished off the main bearings. AMC bearing shells are available up to 30-thou oversize, but that wasn't enough to take out the score marks in the crankpins.

'I used 60-thou oversize British Leyland Mini shells,' says Jack, 'and welded up the breather hole in the crankcase.'

'I'm really pleased with the bike,' says Jack. 'In Ireland I managed to beat Bud up the Healey Pass. We were neck and neck nearly to the top, and trying so hard the bikes were stepping out on the hairpin bends, but his 500cc Ajay single isn't as quick as my 550 twin' 



Janipot suspension units can be dismantled for servicing

## There ain't no substitute for cubes

**A**SSOCIATED Motor Cycles of Plumstead Road, London, announced the AJS and Matchless badged spring frame vertical twins just before the 1948 Motorcycle Show. With a bore and stroke of 66x72.8mm, the 498cc engine was, said *The Motor Cycle*, clearly the result of experience gained from the Porcupine unit construction racer. Both engines used a third, central main bearing, but looking for other similarities between roadster and racer taxes the imagination.

You can look, but you can't buy: those handsome twins on AMC's Earls Court stand were for export only, with America the prime market. British rid-

ers had to wait another year before the Matchless G9 Super Clubman and the AJS Model 20 Spring Twin were available on the home market, although Harry Louis — editor of *The Motor Cycle* — pulled some strings and got a Matchless in mid-1949.

It was the Americans who demanded more cubes for easier high speed cruising and snappier acceleration. Brian Slark, former AMC employee and now running a motorcycle dealership in Missouri, says that the London firm were glad to oblige. 'Boring cylinders out to 69mm, 3mm over stock, increased capacity to 544.4cc. Engines were stamped with the letter B in the

number, and the bikes were shipped out with an extra one page parts list.'

Produced from 1954-55, standard 550s were fitted with steel mudguards, while the sports models had alloy competition

guards and two toolboxes, one each side. 'They were nothing special,' says

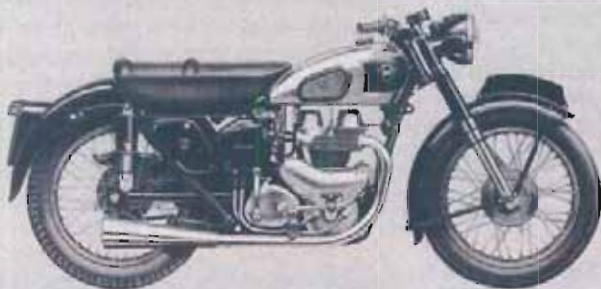


69mm pistons are split skirt, wire wound. Twin barrels are separate units

Brian, 'just typical British money makers. Bigger pistons meant bigger price.'

For 1956 AMC bored out the twins to 72mm, giving a capacity of 593cc. Sports and scrambler versions of the Matchless G11 and AJS Model 30 were offered from 1958. The stakes were upped again that year, when the stroke was lengthened to 79.3mm, giving 646cc.

With no more meat left to shave from the cylinders, and the stroke at maximum length, there was only one way for AMC to offer a bigger banger: the 1964 G15 Matchless used a 745cc Norton Atlas engine.



498cc Matchless G9B wore chrome tank with red panels in 1954