

Why fixing things is good, for everybody!

"The case for working with your hands, or why office work is bad for us and fixing things feels good." Thank you Mark Avis for the thoughts provoked. You'll remember his recommendation from the last issue I'm sure. I just had to say.....

There are several references to that unfathomable classic "Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance" in here. This too is pure philosophy and I was surprised by that as well. The trouble with philosophy for me is that it enjoys the problem rather than attempting to resolve it. That is it's more important to establish why and how the problem exists and how it should be expressed instead of doing anything about it. It's perfectly sensible to observe that modern life negates the sense of achievement, self esteem and real life, worthwhile accomplishment fixing things induces, and point out that working in an office is not what we've evolved to do. So why do we? The basic premise of the book seems to be a complaint that we are educated to cope only with modern life's consumerism and therefore less able to become self reliant and individual. It must be said that our education is paid for by the same establishment which hopes to make money from the knowledge we gain. We are nurtured as business fodder. How on earth does riding a Russian motorcycle have anything to do with finding a refuge of calm and tranquillity in an ocean of profit driven madness? Mr Crawford, author of "The case for....." ran a business as a motorcycle mechanic and sank into despair as modern motorcycle manufacturing made his skills redundant. This is exactly what happened to me too. Here's the big picture as seen from the limited perspective of the editorial experience.....

When a consumer buys a new motorcycle, what they actually buy is 'new' and not 'motorcycle'. Marketing will have convinced them their investment in such a joyful thing is worthwhile but built into it will be features designed to look old when newer is launched next week. We all used to joke about built in obsolescence as it was called but that was something which complicated the spare parts supply and callously offered something available then, available a few models later so the manufacturers could sell those as improvements as well. To be fair though, they often really were improvements. Now they're not.

'Motorcycle', that machine with a wheel at each end and an engine in the middle, hasn't improved for a long time. Real world road conditions have been more than adequately coped with for thirty years at least. Today green issues are a big thing and the manufacturers use these to make 'new', not motorcycles. Anyone with half a brain can see that the carbon footprint of manufacturing tens of thousands of new motorcycles to replace those they manufactured last week makes the tiny improvement in emissions achieved by the new model pale into insignificance. Programming adjustments to the digital fuel injection, or the introduction of exhaust system valves, intake flaps, variable valve timing, cataclysmic converters or whatever are all marketed as improvements to your riding pleasure and steps towards environmental harmony. However, burning enough gas to produce 100andgoodnessknowswhatBHP is clean is it? Is it bollox!!! Here's what digital engine management's really for.....

Type approval noise and exhaust emissions testing takes place at a particular engine or road speed. It used to be a drive by thing at around 55mph. Who decided on that? We'll get there later. Just say the motorcycle engine in question is spinning at 6,250rpm at that speed. At 6,200rpm it's running normally, in the same smoky, environmentally catastrophic way every other engine does. Then at the critical 6,250, in order to maintain that speed, the throttle is open only slightly, then the fun starts. The ECU, electronic control unit, shuts the valve in the exhaust pipe. This reduces exhaust system volume to match the throttle position ensuring that the pressure waves necessary to scavenge the cylinders properly don't get lost in the cavernous space of a pipe designed to give 350bhp at 16,000rpm flat out. The ignition is retarded and the fuelling richened to impair combustion slightly to keep the noise down, compensated for by a solenoid which opens to allow the exhaust to suck fresh air from the airbox and blow it out of the back

never having been anywhere near the engine. It's then counted as exhaust gas, reducing the measured percentage of harmful emissions by being basically fresh air! Of course the engine won't run very well like this so at 6,300 the ECU switches everything back and you get every bit of your dirty, filthy power back. "And the problem with that is?" I hear you cry. Well.....

I spent hour upon day upon weeks of my professional life trying to get to the bottom of the mysterious "flat spot" our customers were plagued with. Once they found it they kept riding like that, to see if it was still there. It was in fact the point at which the emission tests were carried out. The manufacturers said nothing helpful (incriminating) but our customers were convinced something was wrong. "You have no idea I thought!"

The real advantage over carburetors of digital fuel injection is to enable the major manufacturers to lobby governments to introduce tighter and tighter emission controls. They have so much political power, auto manufacture being one of the big drivers of economies, that it's not unlikely that they can choose whoever they want to be elected! In practice they themselves put in place emission testing that only their technology can pass, impeding any competition from either new, smaller or poorly favoured companies. This is why Irbit struggled to perfect it's fuel injection in compliance with European (BMW, Audi, Mercedes and so on) regulations. Yes, it's a stitch up and it gets worse.....

The globalisation of auto manufacture gives it a voracious appetite for Planet Earth's natural resources and the political power to satisfy it. War is a legitimate business tactic on a global scale and the question must be asked "Is it us, the little consumers and our seduction by marketing which is the root cause of it all?" Oh no! What can we do?

When you buy new, you are intended to be unhappy and dissatisfied with whatever you buy because the people you bought it from work flat out to ensure it, so they can sell you a 'better' one. Don't do that. 'New' is their idea, not yours. It doesn't matter how much of your life you sacrifice to keep up with marketing, you will never get what you want, you get what it wants you to have, again and again and again. Have you ever woken up one morning thinking "My life would be complete if I just had an LCD display to show me my average fuel consumption popping down the shops." or did you only want one because you knew about it? Do you think if you could download fuel consumption from a thousand shopping trips from your motorcycle's USB port you'd want that too? That might be next week's 'new'.

It seems so long ago now but then, you wouldn't have bought a motorcycle which wouldn't have lasted forever. Economies were different then. Russian motorcycles, the ones we can afford, are from such a time. A Matchless, an IZH or Ural had to be repairable because you wouldn't get another one. The example of Mercedes abandoning their dip sticks referred to by Crawford as consumer culture was used by him to question the nature of work. Questioning consumer culture itself is as he puts it "more pertinent". We work to consume and believe it or not there is a choice not to. It always helps to illustrate a point by extrapolating to extremes so on one hand we have the Mercedes customer, who has to work so hard to be able to afford a Mercedes he doesn't have time to check the oil, and on the other, the penniless Ural pilot with time to enjoy it. What's going on there then? This isn't transport we're talking about, it's lifestyle statements.

The greenest motorcycle ever is the one you already own. If you bought a new one last week, so complex, so remote and so precarious, you rely on a global infrastructure maintained by shocking irresponsibility. Dig that 1976 M66 out of the shed, learn to fix it or make friends with someone who can and you will experience motorcycle purity instead. It will be truly yours by becoming the manifestation of your success in repairing it and extrapolating that to its extreme, you'll love it! That's something marketing and the briefly wonderful products it promotes must seek to avoid at all costs, relying on the idea that it can make you love something else, always something else. "What's he on about?" If you like I'll explain next issue!!

Most of the time I ride a Minsk and progress is arduous to say the least. I do this because it's consistent with my own personal economy, something it was evolved to be part of. In comparison Serenity the editorial Ural is soooo smooth, quiet, effortlessly powerful and an irreplaceable joy. I can't help thinking marketing is quite simply wrong.

Is electric the answer? I dread to think how much trouble the auto industry's scramble for the raw material batteries are made of will cause the poor souls who live on top of it. For an insight into the editorial opinion on which is the true path of righteousness check out

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnEMwB7CmgE



Pictured here is a comment by world famous and furtive street artist Banksy, a man with a valid opinion on the state of humanity and the artistic skill to express it. As editor I shouldn't let my personal views influence this magazine's content and I have vowed to fill it with our membership's input first. Over the winter however we've all been snuggled up round our wood burners and our motorcycles have been dripping in condensation in our sheds. This means May/June HV has some spare space and the universe has offered me a birthday present, cheers mate! Anyone outraged or offended by it is welcome to have a go back. It's a magazine, that's what it's for. *This is reproduced from the copies of the ancient Cossack Club news letters Chris Drucker sent me from around 1981. It ends with a hand written note which says "Cont' next mag."* Oh no! we don't have it!! Whoever wrote this was a dealer

and will be very familiar to all his old customers. Does anyone remember?

A Russian of my own.

It all began in 1971 when I saw in "The Motor Cycle" an article about Russian motorcycles and how a London dealer called Fred Wells as going to import them. At the time, I had a little business in the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire, repairing motorbikes that other dealers couldn't or wouldn't touch.

Always on the verge of extreme poverty (for this was one of motorcycling's depressed times), I really needed an agency for a popular make to help finances, so I wrote to the Wells emporium. I expected to receive the usual arrogant "We don't need....." type letter, to add to the similar such from BSA, Triumph, Norton, Honda ect. Surprise, surprise, an invite was sent to me to view the machines at a dealer day. This was to be held at a private airfield somewhere in Essex, as Fred Wells was a keen pilot and a member of the club there.

Come the appointed day I jumped in my 1958 Reliant wheelbarrow (*I like this bloke, whoever he is!*) and screamed the 200 miles down the M1 to the deep south. I was introduced to Fred Wells (How peculiar, I thought) and to Jock Kerr, his chief salesman.

At last, after all the promises and disappointments in the press, I was able to inspect the marvels of Russian technology. There was the Ural "Mars" which we all now and love at £299 plus £89 for the sidecar, an unbelievably low price even for those halcyon days. From memory, a BMW was around £950. (*Serenity, registered as a Mars, must be one of these!*) The sidecar differed from most of the SATRA imported versions in that it had leaf springs instead of rubber cone springing between the chassis and the body, and an opening boot.

The Jupiter 350cc twin was even uglier than the photos suggested (*No, absolutely not!*) with its bulbous sprung front mudguard, and sold for £239 (*Beautiful indeed*). The Minsk "Saturn" (M-105) 125cc was similar to a mirror image of the still popular Bantam except that it had a similar mudguard to the IZH Jupiter and retailed for £119.

The Voskhod 175cc (With less panelling and garish chrome than the Cossack version) was perhaps the most stylish of the range, and a test run proved that the machine was quite a nippy iron for £129.

There was the Riga moped, in two speed form at £69, more of a copy of the Puch than the NSU Quickly that the press talked about. The scooter line up comprised the Tula Tourist which looked like a tank and the Tula three wheeled truck, somewhat similar in concept to the Vespa truck.

The Ural amazed me, and I was an instant convert. All the machines were my type of bike, no frills, no complications, just for riding. To my delight, I was offered an agency and accepted on the spot. I was told that they had a six month parts and labour guarantee, came complete with a packing case substantial enough to make ships from and a handbook more like a workshop manual than the flimsy little leaflets handed out with most other machines.

Before returning on the epic journey in the wheelbarrow I had a drink and some curly sandwiches in the company of some other dealers. I remember one of the partners from Coburn and Hughes stating what rubbish these "commie" machines were, and how perfect Hondas were. They sold many Urals, still sell MZ and import many Italian motorcycles. Some have what it takes (money).

A talk with the bank manager later saw myself and three friends, the dreaded wheelbarrow and a trailer parading down the M1 to collect the first Ural outfit in the north. The description of the packing case was rather an underestimate when we saw it. Around the size of a semi-detached house, only weighing twice as much! No wonder carriage was quoted at £15. Undaunted, we had the behemoth loaded onto the uncomplaining (borrowed) trailer and set off for home.

The wheelbarrow shook it like a rat before slowly gaining the advantage and pulled away. The next exciting moment came when trying to stop! Give Reliant engineers their due, that poor, struggling vehicle made it back to Yorkshire without trouble in about six hours, with an all up payload of around three quarters of a ton, excluding the weight of the wheelbarrow and trailer. Nearly all the Russian bikes were collected this way, but looking back, I think it would have been cheaper to have had them delivered.

After unpacking each Ural or Voskhod it took a full day to prepare for sale. First the anti rust coating had to be removed with the aid of petrol and much elbow grease. All allegedly chrome plated parts, much of the paintwork and much of the alloy had been (in the words of the Russian blurb) "sloshed" with a kind of varnish. The petrol taps had to be stripped to allow passage of any liquid, usually the carburettors needed the residue of Russian petrol removing along with the accrued muck. The ignition timing was checked and altered, the points cleaned and British spark plugs were substituted for the agricultural variety.

All oils were drained including the forks and suspension units.

Maybe one day we'll be able to tell you what happened after that. Watch this space.....