

MONOSHOCK GOLDIE?



Barry Robinson reviews a revolutionary special

Monoshock motocross bikes are the norm these days, many believe this development stems from Japanese engineers and factories but the wrinklelies among us know better!

Phil Irving and Howard Davies with the venerated Vincent HRD machines had long since proved that pivoting each end of the machine such that the wheelbase did not alter between extremes of suspension movement gave stable cornering.

The use of a triangulated rear subframe pivoted directly at the chain centre line was made structurally rigid by the use of twin suspension units under the saddle of the Vincent. When we were discussing this article, Deryk Wyllie reminded me that the late John Wilkinson had been very impressed when, in 1960, a rider turned up at a West Leeds club scramble on the Post Hill circuit with a Vincent scrambler bearing a tractor tyre on the rear wheel. In truth the machine was an

interesting novelty but the rider was not skilled enough to exploit the potential. He had, however, set John Wilkinson thinking.

Sadly it is a long time ago and I did not record the exact date but I was there on the day in 1963 when John wheeled his creation to the start line at a Post Hill scramble. The machine was a revelation with a modified B32 engine, tilted at an unusual angle and it's M20 gearbox set on end! Even more revolutionary there were no rear units and the whole bike was shrouded in a beautifully crafted all enveloping fuel tank/cum seat, oil tank unit and rear mudguard/seat assembly.

John was a top flight specialist in fibre class work, being involved in the manufacture of a Leeds based three wheeler akin to the Heinkel and Messerschmidt rumbouts, does anyone remember the Hunter Scoutcar?

John was a competent engineer

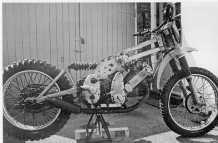
and bike builder and he enjoyed his riding in both trials and scrambles at



The heart of the matter, the triangulated rear subframe and the single shock absorber



Stripped of the fibreglass the simplicity of the design is apparent, the drive side looking almost conventional.



The depth of the innovation is far more apparent in the timing side detail, the gearbox standing on end to take minimal 'wheelbase' incursion and also keep the output sprocket close to and in line with the rear subframe pivot.



The Amal remote needle TTS carburettor shows the age of the design, today it would definitely breathe through a large airbox instead of gulping the raw dusty air!

club level. Living at Pudsey, the natural home of the West Leeds club, he made full use of the Post Hill circuit, which was rented by the club and available for practising seven days a week. Most of John's bikes were 'different' but the Yorkshire Centre was full of star riders in the sixties and John's performances or machines were not noted outside his clubman's.

Long after he had retired from active riding John was persuaded to bring his strange BSA back in to the public gaze at a reunion meeting organised at Hutton Conyers by, amongst others, Tom Ellis, and fortunately James Moorhouse was on hand to capture the sight on film with the photograph seen above.

The bike disappeared back to John's workshop and was forgotten.

Just over a year after his untimely death at the age of fifty nine after a long illness, Ray Dell had the opportunity to have a closer look at the machine and I was invited along to the unveiling!

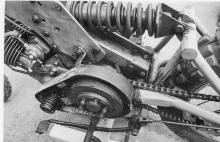
As the tank assembly was removed from the bike, Ray Dell and myself saw for the first time what was underneath. It was a shock, because here was no hopotch with a backbone. For a start the whole top frame was crafted in aircraft quality alloys, from the steering head to over the rearing gearbox, and there was nothing but fresh air under the BSA crankcase and cylinder barrel.

The steering head was still BSA, suitably machined to pick up the top alloy plates. The forks were straight BSA but I thought they looked longer than the usual Small Heath items. Most Yorkshiremen knew that the likes of Arthur Lampkin had longer from fork stanchions to give better ground clearance so it would be no surprise if John had followed that example.

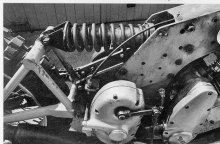
Extra support for the angled power unit is by way of extended studs that hold down the rocker box covers so which is attached a large flat alloy plate.

"I could never stop my BSA rockers leaking oil, but these don't appear to leak at all, nor a trace anywhere" said Ray after a very close inspection of the rocker box covers.

Fuel is supplied via an Amal TTS which, although carried at an angle



Detail of the drive side and the rear subframe pivot



Careful detail, look at the clutch operating lever and the cable routing

for which it was never designed, thanks to careful location of the remote float chamber does not appear to cause any hiccup either at high or low revs. The lightweight triangulated rear swinging arm carries a lightened BSA rear wheel and at its upper frontal points picks up a large sprung, adjustable shock unit which, of course, in those early days was oiled filled.

The tank/seat/mudguard/oil tanks comes off in one unit. Three attachment bolts, the petrol line and flow and return pipes for the engine oil are the tasks needing to be done to get at the whole mechanics of the bike. Naturally the engine oil is dumped when detaching the fibre glass assembly.

It goes without saying that this must have been the lightest 500cc scrambler in use in the 1960s world.

Arch conspirator Dell, who set up all the arrangements with John's widow, Dorothy, and inheritor of the fine machine, John's nephew Nick, could hardly wait to get the bike on to a weighing device. Ray if nothing else knew bikes BSA backwards, upside down etc, having been a Small Heath scrambler for many a long year, and dealer from the Pudsey emporium where he still dispenses bikes to all and sundry.

"Well, I know that my 340 BSA clocked a snidge over 340lbs, dry. We'll honour Dorothy's bathroom scales (they happened to scale that kind of weight, no reflection though on Mrs. Wilkinson.)"

After much propping and balancing the old Beera agreed to pose on the scales whilst we all held our breath in case the bike fell over and smashed any cylinder fins!



The view under the seat shows the careful detail of the fiberglass seat-cum-tank unit.

Bingo, the needle stopped swinging and settled at 290lbs and that with the old standard BSA hubs and steel wheel rims. That's a remarkable figure that would have done most trials models proud in its day, let alone a full five hundred scrambler!

Nick Wilkinson refined the tank/seat unit but no effort was made to fire up the old bike; no oil in the tanks and the quick detachable kickstart had gone walkabout. John used to prod it into life and then shoe the kickstart off; don't know what he did if it stalled, and I have never seen him drop a bike in all the years I watched him, and raced against him, though he was usually half a lap or more in front of me!

John Wilkinson had gathered all his strength to visit the grand reunion at Hutton Campers in 1989, without his beloved BSA, but he did manage a few laps in a demo reunion in the June 1986 Yorkshire Grand National scramble, again at Hutton Campers. Nick, who rides road bikes, says that he will bring the bike out for a run if there is a meeting where interesting old machines are demonstrated.

Tragic though that the creation of J.G. Wilkinson lies silent in a secure garage somewhere in Yorkshire, far from Pudsey.

As a final tribute to a very clever engineer it really should be on show just to illustrate that not everything innovative emanates from Japan.



LEFT: The late John Wilkinson, creator of the monoshock Gold Star

RIGHT: Long time supporter of John Wilkinson, and his revolutionary ideas, Ray Dell.

