



Norton Commando Project

Total renovation rebuild

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In August 2023 (whilst climbing up an Ash tree – as you do !) I received a phone call from a friend asking “What do you reckon a 1970’s Norton 750 is worth ?”. He continued . . . “It’s been laid-up in a garage for years and has a few bits missing but generally . . . is mostly there. It’s a tad rusty but definitely repairable”. After some debate he said he would get back to me with more details. He asked me if I knew anyone who would be interested in buying such a machine ? “I’ll send you some photographs and more information”.



‘Ok’ I said “But, I’m not looking to buy into another project bike at the moment, but I’ll ask around for you”.

A month later, after the initial trunk-call (excuse the pun), I received a series of photographs of the Norton.

I said I wasn’t ‘*in the market*’ for yet another bike project but will give-it some thought.

The initial photos below:



These photographs (taken by my friend Colin at the owner's garage) show the present state of this iconic 1970's legend. I was told by the owner (over a *Facetime* call) that his bike was an ex-Police 'Interpol' Commando, first registered in 1972 and he bought it in 1975. He has owned it ever since. He entered it in the Cornwall Pendennis British Motor Cycle Rally in 1985 (I've got the programme with this bike listed) but it was taken off the road shortly after that.

When I shared these photos with my two best friends (Rick & Debz), they both said the same thing . . . "DON'T DO IT"



But, as you can see . . . I've gone ahead and 'DONE IT ANYWAY' and taken it on-board as my next bike rebuild project. The decision was taken mainly due to nostalgia (& partly due to madness).



Now, in my defence . . . I do have a 'historic association' with Norton Commandos working as I did in 1972 for Paul Dunstall as a 21 year old mechanic rebuilding and tuning-up his 810cc Dunstall engines & bikes. Great Days.



The two photos above right: show the Commando being delivered by Colin, all the way from Falmouth to sunny Wolverhampton (in his trusty Van).

I can see *around & through* the rust'n'dust & 'crud' to see the true *potential* that this bike offers. I have no delusions or misconceptions about this bike, in its present state; It is going to be a very expensive & time consuming renovation project.

Someone said; "it's gonna be a *Pelican Spend*". "What does that mean" I foolishly asked . . .
"You know . . ." they said
"it's gonna have a **HUGE BILL . . .**"

The word moribund best describes this particular Commando (in its present forlorn state).

But things can only get better from this point in time . . .

I can just imagine *hearing* viewers comments . . . "Yes, but this is no Dunstall Commando" (correct, it's no Dunstall - yet) !

AND . . . Yes ! it is very rusty & crusty and in need of a great deal of work, time & money to renovate this bike and fully restore it.

But . . . it has been one of those 'rebuild projects' that I've been thinking about 'doing' for literally *Years'n'years*.

As I *Do Not* intend to start work on this rebuild project until both Velocettes have been completed – I decided to put as many of the loose bits'n'pieces (that came in several boxes, already dismantled) back onto the bike so as NOT to loose said parts (whilst in storage). I'll probably end-up loosing most of the bits anyway (which seems to be 'the Norm' for me). But . . . at least it looks a bit more like a motorcycle now. As the original Norton seat was missing I decided to place my Velocette MAC seat on there (just for the photo and to see what it looks like on this bike).

The Velo seat obviously doesn't fit the frame properly – but at least makes it a bit more presentable-ish (Okay, who am I fooling here) !

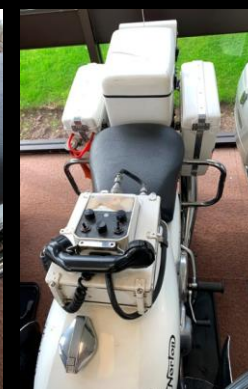


The main question is . . . do I restore it to it's former glory – as a faithful representation of what it should look like ? Or: Do I do what I usually do – and change loads'o'stuff and make a hybrid version (that vaguely resembles 'a Commando') by making quite a few new parts (as I have done many times before) out of Dural (duraluminium) and other materials - making non-standard fixtures and fittings, etc. and also, fitting non-standard parts on it (such as replacing the Norton Lockheed front brake calliper with a racing AP version, or taking the original standard footrests off and replace them with home-made rear-set rests, etc. etc).

One thing I would like to do is to fit an aluminium petrol tank & make my own fibre-glass seat (like I did on the Venom). Maybe change the colour of the frame ? So many colours to choose from: Red, Orange or Silver. Or even 'Blue' (like my Norley) ? Only time will Tell.

During the Schools' half-term holidays (Wednesday 1st November 2023) I visited the National Motorcycle Museum. The main motivation for my latest visit (as I've been to the NMM many, many times over the years) was to have a closer look at their Norton Commando collection & to see 'their' Norton Interpols & other Commando examples. I've included the following photographs (pages below) to illustrate what the original 'Interpol' looked like. And also; to check-out and get a first-hand view of the many and varied options & configurations used on their Commandos. It is quite obvious that the petrol tank fitted to my bike is an 'Interstate' tank (which has a larger capacity than the roadster tank). I actually prefer the Roadster petrol tank, which although holds less fuel is a more stylish and attractive looking petrol tank.

The Commando Interpol below is an 850cc Mk 3 with electric start, whereas 'mine' is a 750cc Mk 2 with front *disk brake* (1st iteration Interpol).



This is missing on my Commando, so this will be one of the 1st modifications that I make - a remote, spin-off oil filter added to the underside sub-frame.

The above intepol photos are a close representation of what my bike would have looked like when it was first registered in 1972 as a Police Interpol Commando.

The majority of changes that was made to the later version(s) were mainly to do with the engine, and slight improvements to the isolastic system and electric system. The rest of the cycle parts and body-work remained mostly the same (during the relatively limited production time of this version of a Norton Police bike).

The next generation of Norton police bikes (albeit for a short time) was the Rotary engined 'Commander'. Obviously there were so many other manufacturers who produced bikes specifically for police use (including the Velocette LE watercooled model, Triumphs, Francis Barnett, BMW, etc etc), but I'm only interested with my Norton at the moment.

I will post more photos of *my Norton project* as soon as I actually 'start' work on it.

The following photographs (below) are from the marvelous and utterly brilliant NYC Norton special-builder Kenny Cummings (who still races Seeley framed Commandos). He has many years of race-track successes and building specials (such as the Commando shown below) for years.

In fact it was the NYC Norton Seeley framed bike (that I saw eight or nine years ago on his web site) that gave me the 'Push' to build my Featherbed Norley. I chose the Norton Featherbed frame based upon my purse-strings alone (I've got champagne tastes, but with only beer money to work with) so, in other words, I couldn't afford to buy a Seeley frame at that time – hence the cheaper and easier to locate featherbed frame that I used for my Norley project.

This version, I think, is truly magical and I will be most pleased if I can produce something looking very similar to this Commando (below) still utilising many of the original Commando frame and most of the original engine/gearbox parts. Time will tell what I end up with ✓



I fitted a very similar looking alloy-petrol tank onto my Norley Special (checkout my Norley photos below as a comparison on the tank & seat).

My tank was off a Manx Norton (specifically made to fit the wide-line featherbed frame) and I made my own fibre-glass seat for the Norley with a piece of thin aluminium plate that was glued onto the 'hump' and polished to finish-off the seat. I did have my seat 'professionally covered' though (i.e. not covered by me) but the finished home-made seat does resemble the one used (above) on the NYC Commando.

So, I will definitely be making a new fibreglass seat for my Commando when the time comes.

Well ! That's the look I will probably be going for (but there's still time yet for me to change my mind).

Well ! as usual . . . that's the Plan.



The above Norley photos added only to show the similarity between my own Norley alloy tank & seat and the NYC Norton on previous page.



The photo on the 'Left' is of a 1989 Norton Commando 750cc factory racer known as 'The Yellow Peril'. This was a *Factory-prepared* ready to race model which was (I believe) sold to 'Joe Public' as a ready-made / bought-over-the-counter Production Racing machine.

You can see where Paul Dunstall got some inspiration from Norton re; style of tank, fairing & seat, and later Norton being inspired by PD who then started to produce their own '850' version (after Paul's 'Dunstallised' bikes became so popular & successful with his own cast 810cc Barrel & redesigned cylinder head version, etc).

This photo is only included for general interest, but "Come On" you've got to admit it . . . it does look like a lovely, well turned-out bike.