



(Motorcycle courtesy of Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum)

SCOUT

I was determined to travel the 700 miles to Leeds, Alabama, to photograph motorcycle engines at the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum. I had a twelve-year-old Mazda dentmobile with 145,000 miles on it, but I was feeling lucky and I was going to trust it to survive the journey. If I ate light and found cheap motels I could probably complete the trip in five days and 300 US dollars. Not a prohibitive sum, but still a big investment in something I wasn't sure would ever have a pay-off. My life has always been filled with leaps of faith. Maybe that was why I didn't have any money.

Enter Jim Bagnard, my riding/drinking/wrenching buddy and occasional business associate. Jim had been fairly successful as a part-time motorcycle industry entrepreneur, but his day job was as a captain for American Airlines. When he found out that I was planning a trip to the Barber Museum he decided to go with me, just to visit the museum. Jim appreciates vintage motorcycles and has a special passion for Indians.

Airline pilots receive a certain amount of flight benefits for traveling companions. He was able to arrange discounted airfare for us to fly into Birmingham; cool. The trip would still probably cost me the same amount of money, but it would save me a long drive in a dodgy automobile.

When we arrived at the museum we paid our admission and I asked the ticket lady if I could speak to Jeff Ray, the museum's executive director. I was basically a nobody, just a photographer who had emailed some weeks before asking to come by and take some pictures, so I wasn't surprised when he couldn't exactly recall who I was or why I was there.

Jeff was a tall man with a pleasant face and the politeness that southerners are famous for. But underneath I could tell that he was all business. I explained about the project and told him that I planned to eventually sell the images as posters so I wanted his permission before I started shooting. He considered this for a moment and said there would be two rules: I was not to shoot any pictures of entire motorcycles, only details; and I couldn't shoot any pictures at all of the Britten that was on display. Perfect ... I went to work.

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The Scout had the biomechanical lines I always look for. Indian always had a flair for style with its motors.



(Motorcycle courtesy Jeff Dancey)

SQUARIEL

Here is another nifty engine I found at a Lake O' The Pines Rally. The Ariel Square Four was always near the top of my 'must have' list. This fine example belongs to Jeff Dancey of Houston. Jeff was at the rally with other members of the British Motorcycle Owners Association. Not only was Jeff pleased to have me photograph his Ariel; he even gave me a couple of beers to enjoy while I did it.

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Having a reliable, affordable and high quality print product, the Metallic prints opened up my sales options. And those options could help me with my ultimate goal of becoming famous. I'd like to say that I wanted to be more famous than the Beatles, but that would be blasphemous. Besides, I'm only making pictures of engines.

So, since I was playing famous artist, I decided to find an art dealer to represent me. There are a lot of motorsports art dealers out there if you look for them. I sent out a half dozen inquiries to see if there was any interest in representing my work.

I found that many of the motorsports art dealers only carry Harley-Davidson related art. My engine pictures were practically invisible for this group and I never heard back from any of them. Luckily, I did hear back from Mike Mayer of CruisinGoods.com. His operation is web-based, and he carries a wide variety of motorsports art, including motorcycles, autos and aircraft.

I confessed to Mike that I had no idea what I was doing, and that I would need his help to get started. After several email exchanges we worked out that he would list my work on his site and, when he received an order, he would send me the information and a check for my share of the money. That plan has worked out pretty well.

I now could say that I was represented by an art dealer. Cool. That helped to give my work a little more credibility. And the inclusion of my name among his list of other well-established motorsports artists didn't hurt either.

We didn't have many sales initially. However, by Christmas 2006 we had some satisfying sales. I still didn't feel like a real artist, but at least I was beginning to think like one.



(Motorcycle courtesy George Tuttle)

TRIUMPH T-120R

It was time to add another Triumph to the collection. Fellow Peckerhead, George Tuttle, volunteered his pristine T-120R to the cause. I photographed it in his driveway on a Texas summer Sunday morning before it got too hot. Too late; it was already too hot.

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Anticipating in the spring of 2007 that I'd soon be ready to produce a book, I came up with a great idea. I would send out a call for motorcycle enthusiasts to contribute essays about the engines for the book. That way I'd have a variety of impressions to go with each engine picture. That idea turned out to be a dismal failure. Seems there aren't as many folks who like to write as I had anticipated.

I received only a couple of contributions. The first one I received was from Christian Clarke. So, to honor Christian's efforts I'm printing a portion of his essay on the T-120R:

"The first Triumph T-120 Bonneville was offered for the 1959 season with 649cc, a splayed port cylinder head, and twin carburetors. The 'T' stood for Tiger, the '120' advertised its alleged top speed, and 'Bonneville' was just a nickname – referring to Johnny Allen's Salt Flat record – no one thought would stick. The nickname took and the motorcycle industry was caught gasping for breath and bandying for second best.

Throughout the Sixties, changes to each model year

helped refine the peaky nature of the Bonneville's high performance. By 1969 Triumph had all its ducks in a row. Malcolm Uphill won that year's Isle of Man Production TT on a Bonneville, averaging 99.99mph per lap, with the first ever 100mph lap by a production motorcycle. Obviously, the race winning production bikes were a little bit different than the showroom floor models.

"Restorations for classic motorcycles generally fall into two categories, show bikes and riders. Trailer Queens are seldom ridden because British bikes leak. They've never not leaked. Once oil is pumped throughout the bike, it's a trying task to keep it in its place. Gas drips from the carbs, chain-oil coats the rear wheel, and over-tightened bolts provide myriad possibilities for escaping oil. And there's lots of oil. The 1969 Bonnie uses four different types of oil: engine oil, gearbox oil, primary case oil, and fork oil. It is not uncommon to see different shades of lubrication collecting underneath a parked Triumph.

"Triumphs in the late '60s, unlike their Japanese counterparts, required attention. Before every ride, bolts needed to be tightened, fluids needed to be checked. Routine service was a weekly endeavor, not just every 3000 miles. By the time a British bike had passed from one owner to the next, oil changes and tune-ups were rarely given their proper due. Cut to 30 years later and you have a lot of leaky, foul-minded motorcycles, and owners craving more civilized machines. You don't get into old bikes without an idea of their maintenance needs."



(Motorcycle courtesy Clay Walley)

SPITFIRE MK II

Peckerhead Clay Walley wanted me to include his BSA Spitfire engine in the project. I am a sucker for BSA engines. It took a few months before we could get the bike and me in the same place with a camera. We finally hooked up at Dean Baker's house where I photographed the BSA and Dean's Tiger 110. Clay pulled the large touring tank off of the Spitfire for a better look at the cool, domed valve cover.

I posted the Spitfire Mk II picture on my eBay store and overnight I received a note from a BSA expert who wanted to point out a flaw in the engine. He told me that the Mk II was fitted with Amal GP carburetors and the engine pictured had inferior Amal Concentric carbs. He went on to inform me that any true BSA fan would cringe at the sight of it. But, he did say that he thought it was a pretty good picture otherwise.

I thanked the expert for his note because I like to learn about each engine in the project. However, I had to point out that I was engaged in an art project about the graphic nature of motorcycle engines and wasn't producing a historical treatise. Very few of the engines in the project are absolutely factory correct. That's the way I like it.

At the next Peckerhead Friday I told Clay about the issue of the carburetors. Clay said that the expert was correct and that the bike did indeed come with Amal GP carbs. He had replaced them with the Concentrics. Then he told me the story.

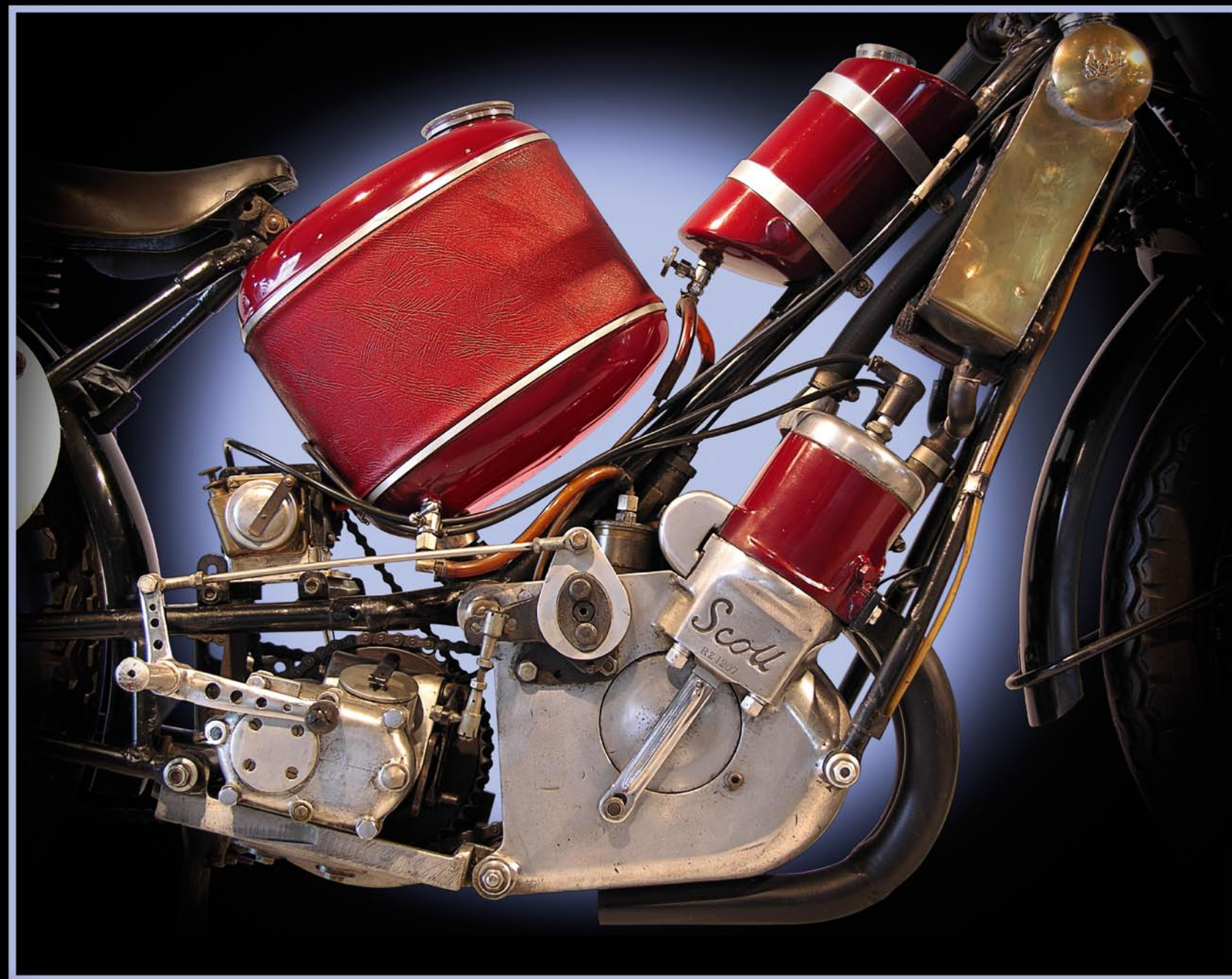
Several years ago a fire at the British National Motorcycle Museum had decimated a good portion of its

collection. One of the bikes destroyed was the Triumph streamliner known as the Texas Ceeagar. This was the streamliner that set land speed records on the Bonneville Salt Flats in the 1950s. It was the motorbike that gave the Triumph T-120 its Bonneville name. After the fire all that was left of the streamliner was a semi-melted frame and a charred engine.

The Texas Ceeagar was originally built in a shop in Fort Worth, Texas. When the NTNOA found out that the streamliner was ruined, they asked the museum to send them the carcass so they could attempt a restoration. Ed Mabry still had the original molds for the fiberglass streamliner body stored in the attic of his shop.

The Norton club rounded up a group of talented and dedicated volunteers ... many of them Peckerheads. Ed Mabry spent months painstakingly straightening the frame and intricate steering system. Simultaneously, work was being carried out on the body, the engine and painting. After nearly two years the restoration was almost complete. The engine in Texas Ceeagar had sported the quality Amal GP carburetors. They would need a set to complete the engine rebuild.

Clay happened to have a set of GPs on his Spitfire. He generously donated his GPs to the project. They remain today hidden inside the fully-restored Texas Ceeagar that is back on display in the British National Motorcycle Museum. Clay says that the Concentrics are better for riding around town anyway.



(Motorcycle courtesy Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum)

SCOTT SPRINT SPECIAL

Since this book isn't about the technical specs of the engines I won't go into detail about the Scott. However, I will recommend that you look up the information on this motorcycle. At first glance it looks like some sort of cobbled together contraption. In reality, it was the most technically-advanced 2-stroke engine for many years. Notably, it had oil injection and liquid cooling. Look it up.

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Thursday, May 31. I came home from work and sat down at the computer in our living room to check my email. "Hey Pam, I got something from the museum." Pam was on the couch watching television. I opened the email and read. "Crap!"

"What's wrong, honey?" Pam got up and came over to read the email. "Oh honey, I'm so sorry," Pam said, as she hugged me. As she hugged me, all I could do was stare at the computer screen and read the email over and over.

Hello Daniel,

Sorry for the delay in responding to your request. I had to go back and retrieve your emails from my spam filter file. Sorry again!

After considering of your request and taking into account all the activities we are conducting in the museum that weekend (Vintage Festival), it has been determined that the museum will not be in a position to provide a 'gallery space' for the exhibit in the museum. A space in the vendor area (not swap meet) may be suitable, but will require a secure tent and such.

As you know, the understanding we have on the use of the images is based on a step-by-step approach. Before this grows to anything larger than our current understanding, we will need to enter into a more detailed, specific 'License Agreement' for the use of images and logo.

Again, sorry for the delay in responding.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ray
Executive Director
The Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum

The message was simple enough. The museum would be too busy for me to set up a display of prints. That was disappointing, but as a devout pragmatist I never count on anything until it actually happens. What put the rock in my gut was the tone of the email. I thought they liked me.

This didn't seem to be the kind of email that was sent to someone you have a good relationship with. My mind was trying to make sense of it all. Maybe I was reading too much into it. Maybe I confused politeness with respect. Maybe my donation wasn't big enough. Maybe they thought I was dishonest and trying to cheat them. Maybe they thought I was making a lot of money. Maybe they thought I was a nuisance. Maybe they thought I was a nobody trying to masquerade as a somebody.

Maybe I really was a nobody trying to masquerade as a somebody. I didn't know what it was, or what I had done to sour things between us. I felt sick, and I cursed my naivety.