

TRACK CRAFT RICKMAN BSA

Feature & photography by Roy Ryan

The B50 that BSA could have built



Staggered fins were milled not chiselled

This one off Rickman-framed BSA B50 has been owned for almost 20 years by Terry Holt, the Australian importer of Rock Oil and a former A grade motocross rider in the UK during the '70s.

An engineer, Terry also owns and collects Aston Martins which he praises for their 'humanity' and personality. His comments make a clear statement about the type of machines he loves, "Aston are built by tradesmen not factory workers - that's the difference between say an Aston and a Mercedes - you can even see the individual scribe marks on each panel of an Aston".

When Terry lived in Hampshire in the South of England during the early '70s it was an epicentre of British motorcycle sport with specialist builders like Eric Cheney, Rhind Tutt (Wasp), Mick Whitlock (Whitehawk) and the Rickman brothers dotted throughout the region. Hampshire was also home to a number of leading riders, many of whom Terry knew personally and rubbed shoulders with both on and off the track. He recalls Graham Noyce and Barry Briggs using the same private practice track at Butlocks Heath while literally just down the road was Ken Heales, working with Eric Cheney on the ISDT Cheney Triumph team bikes. "There was a lot happening around our way...the Rickmans, Bryan 'Badger' Goss and Jeff Smith were always at the Southern Centre Scrambles and when I was only 16 and riding a 500 Triumph Metisse, I was invited by two well known local riders Ivor King and Eddie Turner to join them on weekend trips to various race meetings. Eddie's Jaguar-engined Wolsley 6/80 with three Metisses behind was a common sight around the South of England. On one of these race days they gave me some stern advice, "Terry, don't even bother pushing it on the trailer if it's not ready to race". Eddie and Ivor were both well known for their machine preparation and even though I wasn't even old enough to have a car licence there was no quarter given".

Terry first saw the BSA when a colleague Graham Haswell, owner of Track Craft, a motorcycle engineering workshop and a regular visitor to the Butlocks Heath track, let him throw a leg over it in the early '70s.

"As I understood it, the bike had been commissioned by BSA in the early '70s just after production of the B50MX commenced and was built to their order by the Rickman brothers...It had a Zundapp Metisse style frame but with actual geometry closer to that of the Bulaco engine Metisses which Rickmans were building. BSA took it and fitted their own stock B50 motor and the bike was then used to promote the B50MX throughout the USA".

Today we'd refer to the Track Craft B50 as a market evaluation machine and would conduct countless styling workshops to which typical buyer types would be invited. Someone would then decide if it would fly or die, however, market analytics were not quite so sophisticated at the start of the Swinging '70s. When the bike came home to England it was passed over to a number of riders BSA was accommodating. Graham Noyce, who was riding and working for the Rickmans at the time and went on to Males before taking the 500 World Championship for Honda in 1979, was the first. But even Noyce didn't rewrite motocross history on the Rickman BSA - he was faster and happier on his own Zundapp Metisse. Bob Donaldson took over the reins from Noyce before the BSA passed into Graham Haswell's hands. When Graham first rode the bike he was unimpressed by the motor's performance and BSA was not prepared to do any engine work, so Graham opted to buy the bike from the company. Shortly after acquiring it he swapped the factory's virtually stock BSA unit for a modified motor from his own B50MX race bike.

Haswell had established a reputation as an engineer and fabricator specialising in speedway products. Although apparently impressed by the Rickman componentry and much of the thinking in the bike, Graham couldn't help but question the weight penalty imposed by many of the stock BSA parts. For example, the rear wheel and tyre weighed in at around 30kg (65lb) alone! Haswell turned his skills loose on the former factory special which he named the Track Craft BSA and added his own TC-R. Track Craft Racing logo.

Graham was always fascinated by weight saving and once machined a complete hub from titanium billet for his previous Triumph Metisse. He began by grafting his own alloy spool speedway hubs to both ends, fitting the rear wheel with a lightweight alloy sprocket and a superbly machined fully floating aluminium drum brake turned from billet and fitted with a steel liner. He also used a light alloy Akront rim and a then-revolutionary mechanical disc brake up front. His weight saving in unsprung areas paid off, because today the bike weighs just 108kg (238lb). By comparison the Clews-built CCMs were in the region of 100kg (220lb) and the later HL500 Yamas averaged 115kg (253lb).

Haswell was a talented rider as well as a highly skilled engineer - a superb combination in those early years of do-it-yourself racing. Unfortunately Graham became seriously ill in the early 1970s around the time that Terry Holt was moving to Australia with his Greenes Griffon. Graham's workload was subsequently reduced and this effectively ended his supply contract with Norton Villiers for various components. It also put an end to Graham's racing career and the Track Craft BSA, which was being fine tuned and altered to suit the current race regulations, was laid up. The BSA never had the opportunity to earn itself a place in the Motocross Hall of Fame.

Terry Holt acquired the bike from Graham Haswell in 1982 and it is still in virtually the same condition today, never restored or refurbished and only ridden on 'odd occasions' during the past two decades.

Even after sitting idle for several years the Track Craft racer erupts into life with a roar.

This is the engine which Graham Haswell developed (B50MX GD 02.9.72) and it features a CCM-style staggered fin head and barrel, redesigned inlet tract, Gold Star inlet valve and piston and originally a 34mm carb. Today it's like waking a sleeping giant when the hi-comp motor belches and coughs itself alive after a short push start.

There's no kickstart but the Interspan total loss ignition system makes for instant fire with the Mikuni carb which Terry has fitted. A few windows are rattling in Terry's normally sleep professional class neighbourhood and the big single has successfully stirred every Golden Rover within two blocks. It's a glorious anti-social weapon complete with an open exhaust and a crack like a large calibre rifle.

Terry endeavoured at one stage to take the Track Craft classic racing in Woomera Australia but the bike was not acceptable to the race organisers who questioned its authenticity as disc front brakes. He pointed out that this was the form in which it raced in 1973 and the protest was dismissed when Terry offered to disconnect the front brake and race it like that. After he later found himself on the start line alongside current model MX machinery Terry raised the question, "Surely it's the bikes that are supposed to be old...not just the riders?"

The Track Craft proved to be his with the race spectators and earned itself one first, one second and two third places throughout the day. The crowd went home with their ear ringing to its sweet four stroke staccato.

The Track Craft BSA went back to its shed and Terry believes that the bike would still be knocked back at classic meetings. So the sad reality is that this unique and individual four stroke motocrosser might never be seen again on a race track, as Terry steadfastly refuses to alter the spec to suit any individual rules. "This is how it ran and this is how it should remain...to change anything on the bike would be to ruin its uniqueness", he says.



Original Rickman fiberglass was discarded due to weight



Lightened fork tubes - superb workmanship



Large bolts are either stainless or hollow

Quick detach rear wheel uses Track Craft speed hub