

# THE *Classic Bike Guide*

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**METEOR - RIGHT!**

**PLUMSTEAD PLODDERS**

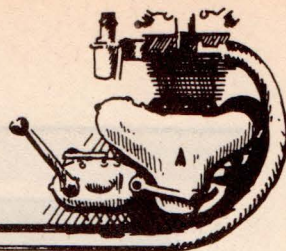
**CLUB CALL - THE IRON HORSE CLAN**



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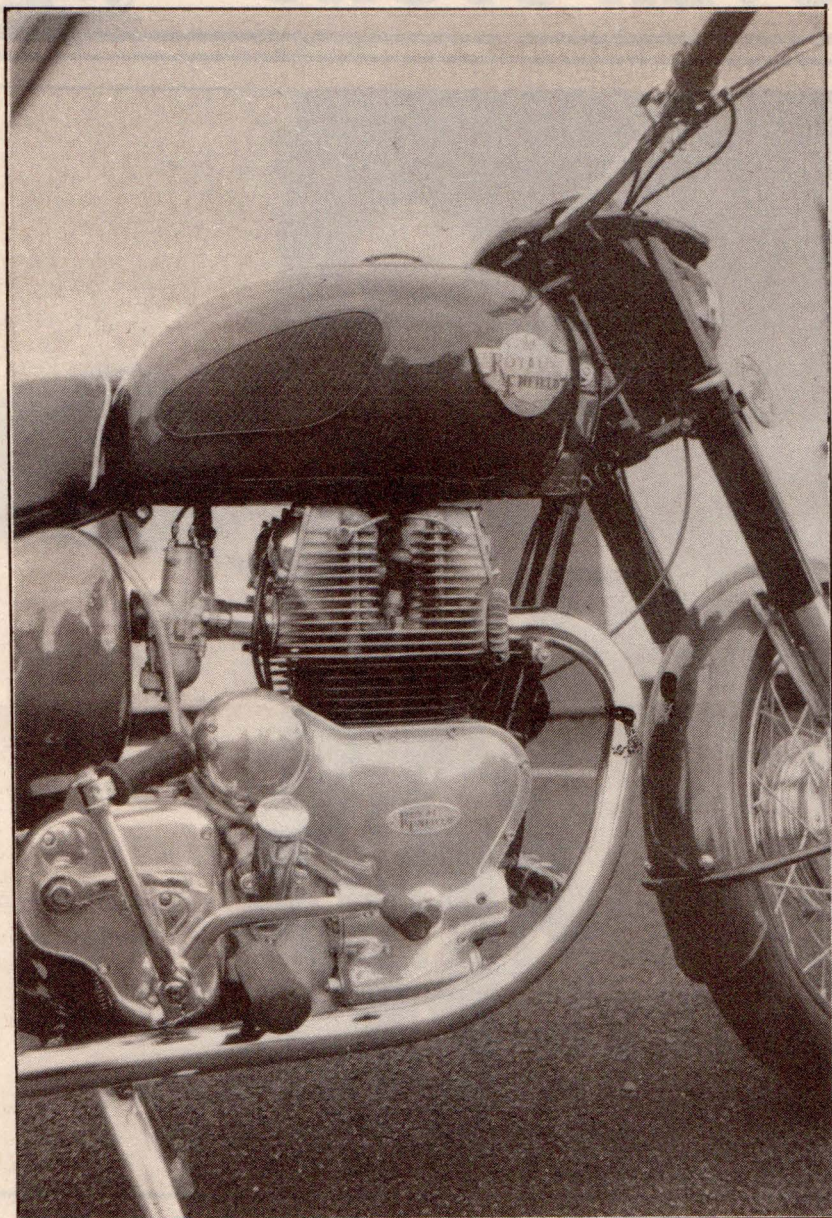
# COVER STORY



## METEOR - RIGHT!

RIDING ROYAL ENFIELD'S SMALLEST TWIN

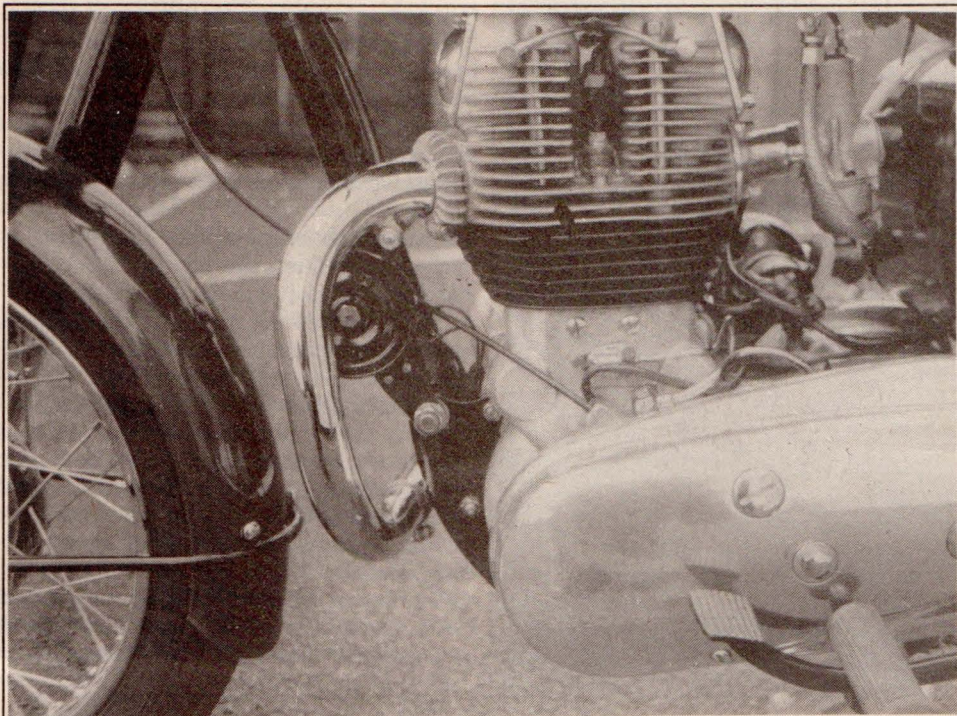
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There are three ways to acquire the classic of your choice, assuming that you don't have too much of the dreaded wallet cramp. You can go out and buy a restored original bike

- which can be expensive. You can pick up a well worn specimen of your life's love and have it restored or spend the time on it yourself. You could buy a few bits to start with

## THOUGHTS



Royal Enfield's twin engine. Handsome from either side

and acquire the rest, but that's generally recognised as the masochists's route. If the alternatives had signposts, number three would carry the warning 'Nutters Only'.

Ray Cound doesn't strike you as a nutter. Just a quiet spoken Midlander with a background in which Royal Enfields loom large; living within ten miles of the old Enfield factory, that's not too surprising. Not that he started his riding career with the marque; taking the standard route of the 50s with a little Triumph, a 150cc Terrier that gave two years of service and convinced him he should move up the Triumph tree to their 350cc Model 21 twin. He put his name down for one with W L Handley of Birmingham (if you're even older than I am, you may know the name Handley as a TT winner of

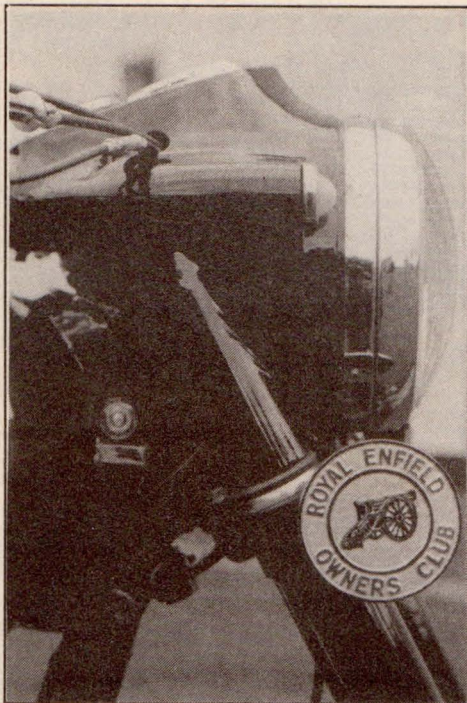
note) and waited. And waited. And got fed up with waiting after six months had passed.

'I went to ask if they'd got any news and they hadn't, but they did have this 350 Royal Enfield Bullet', he recalls. 'So I bought it'.

The Bullet gave him three years and 30,000 miles with precious little trouble: 'One burnt exhaust valve and one broken chain', Ray claims. 'And I used to make it go. Revved it until the valves bounced'.

From 1963 until more recent times, the process of courting, marrying, raising a family and starting and building a joinery business filled his life and had first call on his pocket money. Until he bought a Triumph 21 in 1980, followed by a 250 Crusader Sport in 1985 that got him back into the Royal Enfield fold. Looking for something just a bit

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more powerful than the 250 single, he fancied another 350 Bullet, but the lack of anything affordable finally pushed him into buying a Meteor Minor engine, then picking up a frame and assorted bits from Nigel Buckingham, ex-Royal Enfield experimental department and more recently Constellation and sidecar racer. This was early in 1989, and about the middle of the year he started collecting the rest of one Meteor Minor.

Half a year of visiting autojumbles, answering ads and badgering the recognised Royal Enfield parts stockists to get all the bits together. Alan Hitchcock figures large in the list of people who came up with the goods; his place is less than a day's ride from Ray's place and he was also a good source of advice. 'He did say it was the wrong way to go about building a bike', admits Ray.

In January 1990 the build-up started. Not with a maker's workshop manual, but using a copy of the parts list, which has a built-in safety factor in making you check that every-

## MR ENFIELD

Allan Hitchcock, who was the chief source of parts for Ray Cound's giant construction kit that became his Meteor Minor, is a force in the Royal Enfield spares business. Enough to get most plugs in the owners club magazine and more than a few mentions in despatches from grateful customers whose rebuilds he has helped along. Rather remarkable for a man in his early twenties, the sort that old fogies would need convincing that he knows what is what before they'd quote their Visa number over the phone.

Hitchcock worked for two years from an industrial unit, having quit his dad's sportswear shop to do his own thing. Then he did the sensible thing and moved his stock back home, where the bills for rent and other nasty things are a lot less, even if he does have to keep the mudguards next to the freezer. In three years he has just about become Mr Enfield, with 3500 parts stocked. That's enough to make the Amstrad spew out eighty pages if you want the full list, and they are all listed under the original factory parts numbers, so anyone quoting a spares list is straight onto his wavelength.

He has definite views on some of the parts you can buy for Enfields today. All the stuff he gets from the Enfield India factory is OK, likewise some of the pattern spares coming from India. But not all; like the oil pump with a drive spindle machined out of true circular form, or a kickstart that is more accurately called a kickapart. He happily buys from Enfield India importers Bavanar Products and sources some parts from even further away.

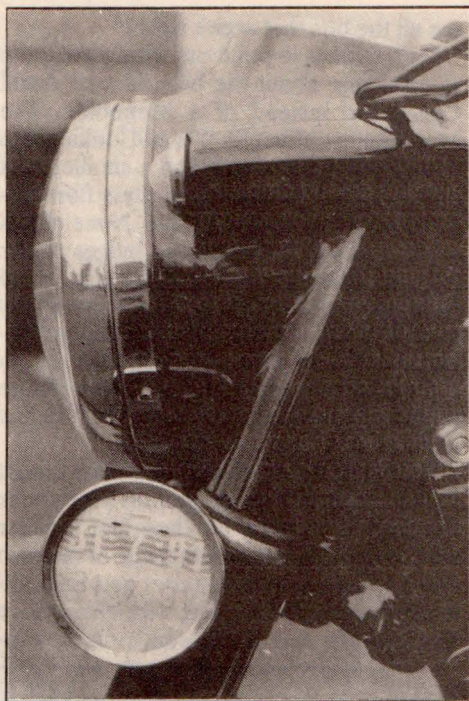
Like pistons for 700cc Constellations and 750cc Interceptors, brought in from Taiwan, currently being tested in his own 1974 Rickman Interceptor and looking good so far. They're in

## THOUGHTS

thing on the drawing is there as you assemble each part. Early on he learned that having engine components bead blasted can be a headache: 'I had the head blasted and wasn't happy with the difficulty of getting all the beads out of the casting', he says. 'I even boiled it in a saucepan on the stove to get them out'. The rest of the engine castings he cleaned himself.

A long list of bits he did himself is not what this story is about, but it is worth mentioning that he built 18 inch rims onto the hub, using stainless spokes. Did the painting too, with aerosols, except for the powder coated frame. Say five hundred hours in the garden shed: enough to send even a Blue Peter gardener barmy; enough to produce one very fine looking motorcycle.

Initial tuning sorted out, the Meteor was ridden to the Royal Enfield Owners' Club National Rally down the road at Ragley Hall, where he was called up to take the trophy for Best 500 Twin. 'I was quite taken aback', he admits. 'Most of the judges were ex-Enfield employees and I thought they'd



## MR ENFIELD

the same short skirt form that later Interceptors used, with the same compression and - very important this bit - the same weight. Ask anyone who's fitted imported pattern pistons to a British bike only to find that the piston(s) aren't the same weight as the real thing; the effect on the balance factor is felt through the white finger syndrome, the blurred horizon and the bits that vibrate off. As well as being the correct weight and almost the same dimensionally except for a slightly greater ovality, the pistons Hitchcock is testing will come in standard, plus 20 and plus 40 oversizes. That distant cheer you hear is all the big Enfield twins owners, looking forward to using them.

Allan also carries a stock of second-hand stuff, most of it sold through mail order and a little at autojumbles. Ask him about packing and he makes sense again: 'Stuff's all packed in cardboard boxes with bubble packing to protect it'.

Bigger stuff gets bigger packing: 'If you send a ten kilogramme crankshaft in just a cardboard box, you know it's going to suffer'.

Don't think nobody does that, because I've seen a reground crank sent back in just a cardboard box. Its state on arrival confirms Hitchcock's view.

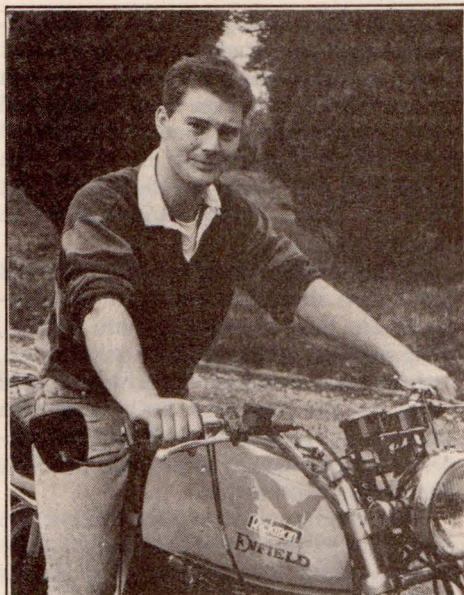
At the end of 1988, he was offered the remaining stock of London specialists Gander and Gray. This was the result of eighteen months trying to persuade Jack Gray to do a deal and it produced two and a half overloads for a long wheelbase Transit. 95% of it was new, too. He beat a lot of longer established names to get that plum, which itself is a tribute to his reputation in Enfield circles.

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see all the bits that aren't right'.

He's anxious to point out what's not quite as catalogue about the bike, like an Amal Concentric instead of a Monobloc. The Monobloc wouldn't fit: 'I'm still looking into that. They must have fitted a smaller tool box'. Or the toolbox lids in glass fibre because originals ain't to be had. None of this seems to have bothered the judges at the biggest Enfield gathering of the year, so he must have got something right. I personally suspect it's the lack of over-the-top polishing that the smooth alloy components on Enfield bikes encourage those with a Cetem polishing kit and time to waste. The bike just looks all of a piece. A nice piece.

Riding it didn't disappoint. The quaint British habit of putting ignition keys under the thigh is a puzzle for those not familiar with the model, but a slight tickle of the carb and a swing on the kickstarter gets immediate response. The engine, with chain drive to camshafts and nil clearance on the tap-



Hitchcock and Enfield go together

## MR ENFIELD

Official hours for phoning Alan are from 2.00 to 7.00. In fact he's at it from nine in the morning until nine at night, and the portable phone he wouldn't hold when having his picture taken keeps ringing as he checks the racks of parts. The stock is kept in an assortment that's not quite so hi-tech, from galvanised ammunition boxes and an old gents outfitters shirt display counter to the inevitable bakery tray. Where would the autojumble business be without Mother's Pride to provide the carrying hardware?

As well as the Rickman Interceptor, Allan runs a 250 Continental GT. 'It's just about at the end - I've thrashed it for six years. It didn't leak a drop until I loaned it to a mate for a trip to Oxford. He thrashed it there and back and it's leaked since then'. Just when he'll find time to sort it is not clear.

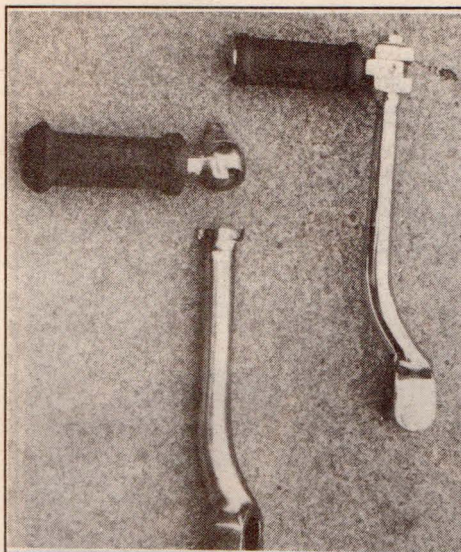
Working with him every evening is his fiancée, Joanna Whiteley. With Finnish origins, Joanna is fluent in two languages, and surprises the odd enquirer from that part of the world who tries out his English and gets a reply in his own lingo. Like finding a Little Chef waitress who can speak Brazilian. Or English.

Hitchcock's knowledge goes well beyond the parts list. He'll tell you which of the current Enfield India stock will fit Redditch versions; did you know that the fuel tank on the current curry burner will go straight onto one of the early twins? And if he doesn't have what you want right now, he'll put you on the list and call you when he does find it. If it's really rare it may take a while, but he does keep trying. One punter got a call nine months after he'd asked, to be told the part was there if he wanted it.

It's putting himself out to that extent that has won Hitchcock a lot of happy customers. Even the old fogies ask for his help today.

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## THOUGHTS



Some pattern parts work, others don't. Unless you're heavily into bump-starting in all conditions, the conclusion is obvious

pets, is a real revelation - I've never met a British twin so mechanically quiet. The exhaust note is an inoffensive throb, not enough to offend neighbours unless you're blessed with the Noise Abatement Society next door.

A few bikes you ride fit you from first touch of jeans to seat - very few. But that's how the Meteor struck me, everything is naturally placed and just where fingers or feet went for them. The motor pulled smoothly up to about 60mph in top, when a very slight vibration set in, but with only 500 miles since rebuild it wasn't for me to work it hard, even if Ray had said that 70 was OK. Upright bars and low seat height (30 inch inside leg, feet flat on ground) combined to make it easy to control, essential on a strange bike when you weave your way through a complex Midlands estate where none of the junctions seem to have warning signs.

On the open roads of Worcestershire, the

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## *In Praise of Smaller Twins*

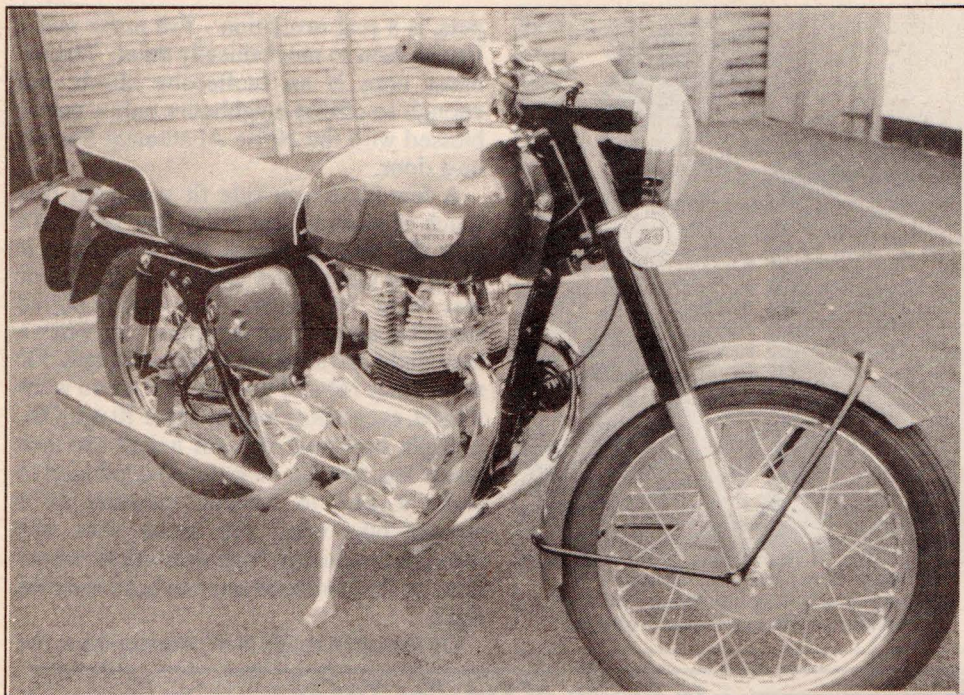
Jim's surprise at just how impressive a motorcycle is the RE Meteor Minor confirms a belief that I have held for many years now (writes FW). It's nothing startling, just a gradual realisation that smaller twins are often better twins than their bigger stablemates.

I have always been an AMC fan, and sharing the shed with the recently wrecked 650 Ajay is a rather earlier 500 twin. In terms of smoothness, of docility, of flexibility and friendliness, there is no competition between the two of them - the smaller twin wins every time. Where the 650 shines (or shone, as methinks it will take more than a while for it to recover from its recent encounter with the front of a Volvo coach!) is in its greater acceleration and two-up hill-climbing. When I think in terms of sheer rumbling gently charm, the 500 is my choice.

It was the same when I was the owner of a succession of Beezas. Easily the most enjoyable was an A7SS, which had all the crispness of the Super Rocket which succeeded it but none of the vibes, leaks and disintegration which so characterise a stressed powerhouse. The A7 was a smashing bike, and I look forward to the day when we're offered one for a spin in the CBG. Shortly after the Rocket left home, I acquired another BSA twin in the shape of a Devimead Lightning. This was a real man's machine - huge performance, it's true, but the vibes, the leaks, the disintegration! While still infatuated with the 750cc monster, I was loaned a Royal Star - a 500cc baby brother, of little reputation even today - and what a revelation that was! Had the owner been willing (or foolish, in his words), I would have swapped the bikes there and then; the 500 was sweetness itself.

Our obsession with performance statistics, with paper figures, hides from many of us the simple fact that a motorcycle doesn't have to be a fire-breathing beast to be enjoyable. And if you really want to amaze yourself, compare your journey times over a decent cross-country run on a brace of twins of differing capacities - than ask why 650s command premium prices...

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bike accelerated smoothly to an easy 60-ish mph and cruised along without effort. The Albion gearbox is a little notchy, but feeling the next gear through was no problem. The unique Enfield neutral selector didn't select when I tried it, but with the normal route to neutral so easy, the extra lever was redundant for my time on the bike.

Initial time on the bike was to allow Stu Garland to get his pictures, then it was all back to Ray Cound's place. Except I didn't want to stop, I just wanted to get back on the bike and go and enjoy it.

Enjoying a known quantity is a pleasure you can anticipate. Finding that a bike you'd never rated as being out of the top drawer is really a joy to ride is better - I really fell heavily for this one. It's smooth, thanks to the Redditch habit of dynamically balancing the crank, it handles well at normal road speeds, even round bends where Thatcher's

Patchers have been playing havoc with the tarmac, and it stops well. With only a seven-inch single leading shoe front brake, that may seem daft, but the Meteor Minor stopped better than my Dominator with eight-inch twin leading shoe up front.

I stopped to show it off to a friend who has an Ariel KH500 and Triumph Tiger 100, both from the fifties and the Tiger professionally rebuilt. He was amazed at the almost complete lack of mechanical clatter, and had a thoughtful look on his face when I rode off. Like me, very impressed.

I took it back reluctantly. There aren't many bikes that make me wonder if a personal devotion to another marque hasn't been misplaced all these years - I can think of maybe four in nearly twenty years of riding and writing about bikes. Make that five.

*Jim Reynolds*