

AN UNEXPECTED TANK BADGE.

It had been just one of those things. An auction for a pair of Royal Enfield plastic tank badges. These had caught my eye as I hadn't seen the red variant before, but as 'Kevin', my Meteor Minor De Luxe was a similar colour, I put a bid in. I had no idea at the time, that this was to lead me on an interesting journey of discovery.



'Kevin' my 1959 Meteor Minor de luxe

The usual plastic badges coloured are gold, silver and red, but the auction ones were Maroon, silver and what appeared from the photographs to be gold lettering. I just had to have them and I duly won the auction and waited for their arrival.

My curiosity about the colour had been aroused and I went online to search for photographs of other RE's with maroon badges. Initially, I found nothing, which seemed very strange. I did wonder if my badges were later reproductions or home produced, but I just had to wait until they arrived.

In the meantime, I had a stroke of good luck. Mark Mumford contacted me to say he recalled seeing maroon badges on a 1956 Bullet, but they were somewhat rare. I resumed my searching and was finally rewarded with a photograph of a 1955 Meteor 700, sporting maroon tank badges.



1955 Meteor 700

My next move was to turn to the catalogues for 1955 and 1956. Suddenly, I saw a glimmer of light as I compared the two. There were three colours in

the 1955 catalogue with the various models in the range being finished in one of the three as standard, with the other two available as an extra. These were, Polychromatic Silver-Grey, Maroon and Olive Green. All the models had an "Attractive metal tank motif of modern design".

The 1956 catalogue was a very different affair. The whole range was available only in Maroon, the other colours having disappeared. Page 24 of the 1956 spare parts list for the 500 Bullet stated "For the 1956 '500 Bullet' Deep Maroon is standard." Interestingly, all models (except the 150 Ensign and 250 Clipper) had a "New attractive plastic tank motif". A suspicion grew within me that the factors of a new badge, the range all in Maroon, and the date of 1956 could lead me somewhere.

The badges arrived, but I was in for a surprise. The 'gold lettering' turned out not to be gold at all. In fact; the crown, the wording and also the three dots at the bottom were just unpainted translucent plastic. The red circle was fine as were the silver 'wings', but the rest was devoid of paint. It had only looked gold due to the auction photo having been taken whilst they had sat on some light coloured wood! So what exactly had I just bought?



The 'gold' areas were actually unpainted

About this time, Chris Tindal replied to a post on Hitchcock's forum. In the spares section, there was a 1956-57 twin bullet tank, with mis-matched tank badges, one gold, the other maroon. The date 1956 had popped up again.

I duly sent an email to Hitchcocks, and Allan duly responded, giving permission for the tank photo to be used, and more interestingly, he said that the maroon badges that he had seen were on the maroon 1956/57 Bullets. He had not seen them many times but it had always been on bikes from that era. He also has one on the wall at Hitchcock's which also came off a 1956 350 Bullet.

I do not pretend to know how many coincidences are needed for something to be considered so, but by now, I was forming a hypothesis that seemed to



[Photo courtesy of Allan Hitchcock]

fit quite well. In 1956 (possibly late 1955), RE decided to use only Maroon paint for their motorcycles. They also decided to produce a new plastic tank badge, which would have to be designed and approved, with part of the design process usually consisting of prototypes, consisting of different designs and colours.

I was now heading up quite an exciting alley. Were my pair of unfinished badges just that? Had there been some defect in them, or could they be an actual pair of prototypes? Certainly, the plastic casting looked identical to the standard gold type badge, with the only exception being that the maroon badge had slightly elongated holes.



The unfinished Maroon type left, Gold type right

For each colour added, there is a mask that stops the paint from going onto areas where it is not wanted. Had this been a production badge, I would have expected the red mask to have allowed both the circle and the lettering to be painted at the same time, but to paint the outer circle whilst masking off the lettering would require a totally different mask than that which had been seen on the maroon badges so far.

It now seemed more likely that these had been made as part of a pre-production batch, so that the company could experiment with different combinations of colour for the crown, lettering and three dots. Quite possibly, the decision was finalised before all the batch had been used, with this pair being part of the left-overs!

Now I had a bit of a quandary. I had purchased these to go on my bike, but if there was a chance that these were important, even in a small way, then it would not be right to risk possible damage by installing them. On the other hand, I just had to see!



I just had to try them out!

I carefully put the screws in just finger tight, but the result on Kevin was stunning. Even without the red (or even gold) lettering, the tank badge really sat well with the paint colour. I could see why the badges were chosen for an all maroon range in 1956, but not so suitable when a choice of colour returned with the 1957 range, thus limiting their production run.

Well, I took a few photos before sadly swapping them back for the gold ones. So now I am almost back to square one, looking out for a pair of maroon badges for Kevin's tank!

Hopefully, somebody out there may be able to shed some light on these unfinished maroon badges? Are they a link in the RE story, or can I pop them back on Kevin's tank without feeling guilty?

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