

# Enfield Bullet: Tough

by Royce Creasey

SOME YEARS ago, little knowing where it would lead, I did an article on 'cheapo motorcycling' for *Bike* magazine. It's now considered polite to call the machines in question working bikes, but the general principle hasn't changed. I was then, and still am, convinced that the Velocette Venom is the definitive English bike. At the same time I've become increasingly aware that for most of the people I know a Velo is a complete mechanical mystery. In addition, due to factors which are well known to most Velo owners, there has been an almost complete foul-up on the supply of spares that will actually hold together in use, assuming that they'll fit in the first place. These are serious objections for a working bike, and in fact I'm forced to the conclusion that the effort required to keep my own Velo turning in the necessary 10,000-15,000 miles a year is getting too much from the working point of view. Hopefully I shall be able to retire the Velo from active service and just use it for pleasure, but this is of little use if you need a bike that works and don't really get off on an MZ.

Fortunately God still appears to support skint bikers, and another machine mentioned all those years ago is emerging as the definitive English working bike. Just about everyone who's really got into English machinery comes across with the same complaint: 'These are lovely machines but they all have such stupid problems.' Velo owners resign themselves eventually to a leaking primary chaincase, Triumph owners shrug and accept high bore wear and . . . vibration. Wouldn't it be good if there was a bike which was as nice, but didn't have stupid problems?

The 350 Royal Enfield Bullet doesn't quite make it to that point, but it comes very close. Unlike just about every other company, Royal Enfield continued to develop their products right through the sixties, with the result that by the time they stopped production in the early seventies there were solutions available to all the problems suffered by the Bullets made in the late fifties. Due to this sensible development programme, just about all the late Enfield bits fit the Bullets. You can buy a '58 Bullet and retro-fit enough parts to turn it into a quick, fine handling, oil-tight machine. Add to this the fact that just about all parts are immediately available at sensible prices, and that the parts fit and work, and you can see that this is looking like a good deal.

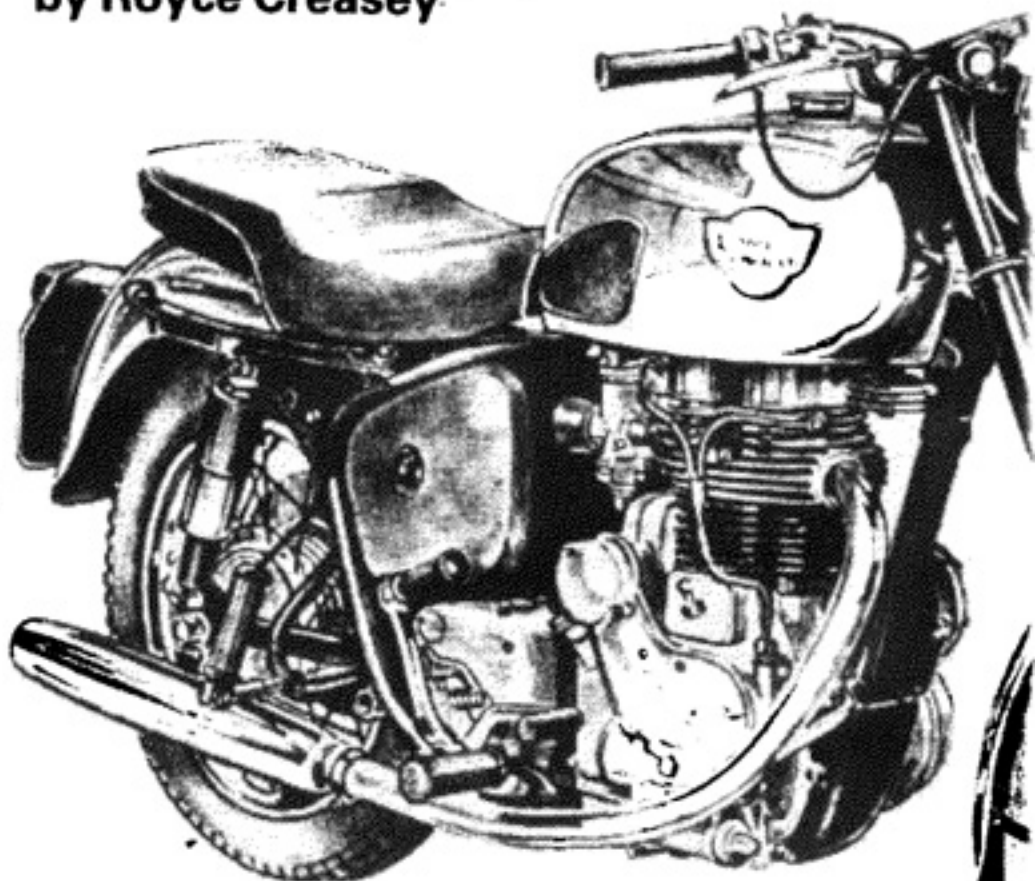


Illustration Bill Bennett

It doesn't stop there, either, if you're mechanically illiterate and quite reasonably don't wish to learn that language, a Bullet will still give you exceptionally good service in return for a level of maintenance just above the trained ape stage. Providing you can tolerate the inevitable problems (and you may not even notice some of them) a standard model will give you a very nice time. Should you choose to discover mechanics and get into the subject through your bike, the Bullet is one of the least painful ways in. The most esoteric feature, the unique lubrication system, is a logically simple pressure arrangement, and is much easier to follow and trouble-shoot than the Velocette's flow system.

The Bullet even tends to tolerate complete neglect and mechanical ham-handedness. I've seen appalling failures in Bullet engines that just kept

on going. Things like split half-time pinions, broken pistons, cageless main bearings, and the classic, the missing exhaust valve guide that I mentioned in the servicing article in the last issue. When a Bullet finally gaunches to a standstill you seem to be able to just remove the broken part, fit a new one and continue. Any of those failures would have spread a Velo engine all over the county. The final point in the Bullet's favour, and indeed Royal Enfields' generally, is that for some strange reason obviously connected with the marketing policy of the cosmic motorcycle company, all Enfield owners that I've ever met are really nice people. You meet some real weirdos on Hondas and some crashing bores on Hondas, but Enfield owners are all right!

There are some good technical reasons behind the Bullet's qualities