

THE 1970 BOL D'OR

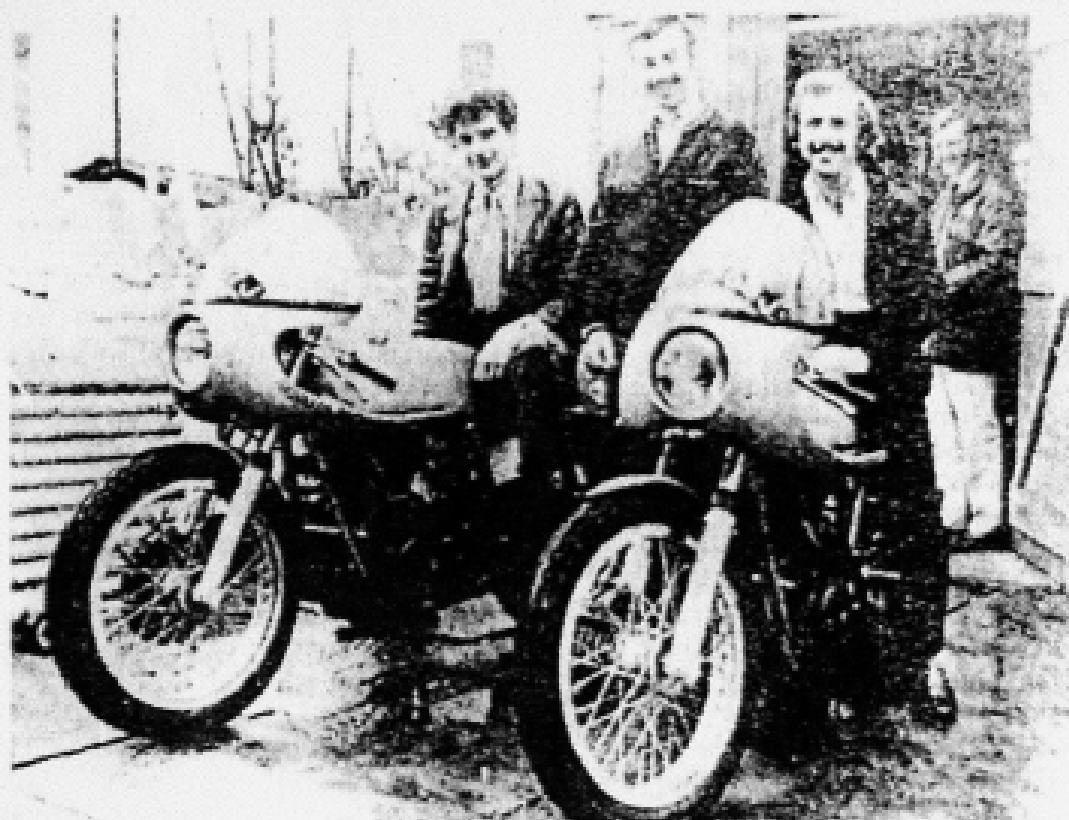
In the late 1960's Enfield Precision Ltd. began to manufacture the Series II Interceptor. The company's involvement in motorcycles was small, a mere 25 machines per week were averaged over the three years until production ceased late in 1970. Using bought-in components such as the Norton fork and front wheel, and the old Enfield Cycle Company's frame now manufactured by Veloce Ltd. (!), most of their output went for export. But testing showed that in the engine at least they had a potential winner. Tremendous torque, unburstable reliability allied to exceptional smoothness and most un-Enfield-like oiltightness could be claimed as virtues of this simple design. Could sales be increased through publicity of some kind? One likely avenue seemed to be long-distance endurance racing, immensely popular abroad, though less so in Britain. Enfields cautiously attempted production-machine events in Britain, but such events had little prestige.

During the early part of 1970, a Welsh motorcycle dealer went on holiday in France and decided to call in at Cr teil Motors whom he knew through a business associate, "Jim" Ferrer-Fort. Cr teil is a south eastern suburb of Paris located between the Seine and the Marne rivers, and Cr teil Motors were the Enfield agents for Northern France. Enfield enthusiasts to a man, they had just managed to import the very last batch of 250cc Continental G.T.'s from Enfield Precision, who had also sent a set of 4-speed gears for each bike! The G.T.'s were known to have a problem with their 5-speed gearboxes which could show up during the guarantee period, and neither Enfield Precision nor Cr teil wanted any of that. The Welshman somehow found himself helping in the conversion, indeed spent most of his remaining "holiday" in this way. Now Cr teil were interested in racing (naturally, being French) and discovered that their new friend had extensive experience both as rider and entrant. They wanted to race Enfields, of course; and thus came about the "French Connection" which was to lead to the birth of the Enfield Metisse and a full attempt at Continental endurance racing.

It had become apparent that the old Royal Enfield frame was simply not good enough for full-bore racing, and no modifications were going to make it so. A new frame was needed, and back in Cardiff, Wyndham Richards, the Welsh dealer began to cast around. He discovered that Enfield Precision were quite happy to supply just engine and gearbox units (it was, after all the only bit they made themselves). He saw that Rickman Bros. were already making a road-going version of their racing frame to take a Triumph unit 650, and approached them directly to see if the chassis could be modified for the Series II. He took them an engine and after some initial problems with breaking frame mountings, everyone was satisfied. Two complete rolling chassis were supplied and Wyndham needed only an exhaust system. This was produced in quite smallbore pipe, with a balance pipe fitted, something like the TSS Triumph of today. The silencers were BSA "track" type, and were modified by Wyndham to disguise them! Now at last they had a serious racing machine. Enfield Precision quietly handed over two sets of special camshafts, and two sets of close-ratio gears that had been lying around the factory for a long while unused, and wished them luck. They were ready to race!

A mere 25 kilometres from Cr teil lies the suburb of Montlh ry, and here in September 1970 would be held the Bol D'or, a highly prestigious 24 hour endurance race. Open virtually to any sort of motorcycle, the few

homologation rules concerned only crankcases; in the race would be TZ Yamahas and at least one HIR Kawasaki. None of these entrants had any ideas of finishing, but were competing for the numerous awards for race leaders and fastest laps at certain race intervals. Prize money was generous, and a good finish could be worthwhile. The Enfields were entered and two teams of riders were engaged, of which three were Welshmen. The bikes were quickly run-in on the South Wales roads and motorways. Tests included a flat-out run up the M.50 Ross Spur! Preparations were made to leave for France, and the local paper published an article, somewhat inaccurately outlining the expedition (as usual) with the accompanying photograph.



Seen shortly before leaving for France are two of the riders, Brian Adams, of New Road Rumney, Cardiff (left) and Vince Chivers, of Harbour Road, Barry. With them (centre) is Mr. Wyndham Richards.

Créteil Motors is a family business and the family "lived in" above the showroom. In the large old French detached building they now happily entertained the complete team. Their generous hospitality has never been forgotten by the riders; many had never been to France before.

Practising could now begin. Few problems arose; on the high-speed banking, the bikes bottomed their suspension, and tended to wander about in a rather disconcerting manner. But after steering dampers had been "borrowed" from 350cc Kawasakis in the showrooms at Créteil, the situation was very much improved. Riding the banking was very bumpy for the riders, but it was no worse than for any other team. One bike sprang a worrying oil leak, but this proved to be only the relief valve screw on top of the crankcase coming loose,

and a quarter turn with a screwdriver instantly cured this. Otherwise the bikes ran like clocks. Handling was excellent, and the bikes were competitive on speed and performance, at least in comparison with the main opposition. This, in those far-off days, consisted of the Triumph Trident, Norton Commando, and a huge entry of much-modified 750cc Honda fours. These were an unknown quantity, and no-one thought the Commando would finish! Thus the little Franco-Welsh team felt that they stood a real chance of success if they could just keep going.

Inexperience of 24 hour racing had led to the team arriving with built-in handicaps however. The fuel tanks gave a range of 1 ¼ hours running, instead of the more desirable 2; this meant that a relieved rider could not relax properly before his next stint, an important point in such a long and tiring race. What was more, the bikes were equipped with a small sports fairing, but it was soon noticed that all serious contenders had very large fairings and lots of lights! did they know something the Welshmen did not?

Race day began with parades and general razzmatazz, though the weather forecast was gloomy. But it was still dry when at 4.00 p.m. on Saturday the race began with a Le Mans start. One team, consisting of Brian Adams and Vince Chivers, had wisely decided that the Enfield's clutch would not stand much ill-treatment and accordingly let the big twin run down to 1,500 r.p.m. each time they negotiated one of the three hairpin bends Montlhéry contained per lap. This was possible with such a smooth and torquey motor and lost only fractions of seconds on acceleration. The other team had not seen the engine apart, and made no allowances for the machine's possible weak spots. They took off in grand style and for three laps were up with the leaders. Then the clutch burnt out. . . . The spare clutch lasted a further hour and it too was reduced to ashes. Fortunately, as soon as signs of trouble had arisen, someone had dashed to the showroom and removed a couple of clutches from the Series II Interceptors. By now, the message had gone home, and there was no more clutch trouble.

But at 6.30 p.m. the rain did begin. It was soon a downpour and now it was becoming obvious why the other bikes had large fairings. . . . but the rain was not just uncomfortable, it turned the circuit into a high-speed skating rink. The Hondas all had double disc brakes on the front wheels and were soon scattered around the hairpins as their unfortunate riders tried to stop the overbraked, unwieldy monsters. As one illuminated the rapidly darkening road in a spectacular sheet of sparks ahead of Brian Adams, it was some small comfort that he must be moving up the field! In fact the Rickman was equipped with a rear disc which was also far too powerful. At 100 m.p.h. on the wet track, it would easily stall the engine! Taking one's foot off the pedal would then restart the engine. Gordon Pantall on the other machine fell off, fortunately without much damage either to the bike or himself. But now the bike could not be kick-started as the shaft was bent. Brian Adams and Vince Chivers actually poured oil over the rear disc, which meant it barely worked and was thus much safer, not the contradiction it might seem.

Montlhéry was lit at the hairpins, and also the grand/stand pits area. But that left one flat-out left-hander, bordered by double rows of Armco barrier, in complete darkness. Triumph's Trident had three lights, but the Enfields were having to rely on just one Jo Lucas headlamp and negotiating this bend at 120 m.p.h. in the wet was just a little hair-raising! Perhaps because of the machine's smoothness, neither in fact experienced any electrical trouble, but if that one bulb *had* gone out at the wrong moment. . . .

As the night ticked away the rain stopped, but the track stayed wet. Other teams were having mixed fortunes. The Norton team had already retired, the Commando lying dead against the pit wall. The Trident was running like a clock, well up in fourth place. The Laverda twin had been in the pits quite early, and the mechanics had incredibly changed the crankshaft in about one and a half hours! From the grandstand could occasionally be heard boos followed by cheers, and investigations revealed the answer quickly. The partisan French crowd were booing loudly each time a lone BMW rider came past, then cheering whoever came next! The Hondas, too, were not without mechanical failures as well as crashes, and after nine hours the Adams/Chivers machine lay seventh, seemingly in a good position. But alas, it was not to be. Vince Chivers came in early complaining of a worsening gear change, and a couple more laps confirmed that the gearbox was seizing. And that, for this team's effort, was that. Although the mechanics struggled heroically for a while, in the end they abandoned the machine to concentrate on the other, which was still running.

During the rest of the race, it once stripped all the teeth off those close-ratio gears, but otherwise kept running till the end though of course nowhere in the results. Tired-out and rather saddened, the team packed up to leave. The Triumph Trident had won the race, ridden by Paul Smart and Tom Dickie; not the fastest bike in the race, they had just kept going. If only the Enfields could have done the same! Neither machine suffered any engine trouble or even electrical trouble; it was all down to that Albion gearbox. Why Enfield Precision had never worked the same transformation on the gearbox that they had on the engine, and to some extent the clutch, is hard to understand, for Enfield's transmission had been famous (or infamous) for many years. Repeated road tests had confirmed the box's ability to produce more neutrals than gears, and the box was simply not strong enough for the 55 b.h.p. of the Series II Interceptor. One of the failings was certainly known, for when I was campaigning an early Mk1 Interceptor in 1969 the foreman at Bradford-on-Avon, Roger Shuttleworth, warned me about the use of a modified sleeve gear Enfield Precision had made. The old steel ones could occasionally seize, especially if the oil level dropped at all. "The bushed sleeve is O.K. until it gets hot," he said, "Then the bush turns in the sleeve so that the oil holes no longer line up. . . ." And that is precisely what stopped the Adams/Chivers machine. There was talk of a return the following year with the modifications dictated by race experience, but it was already too late. Enfield Precision, unable to increase sales, had ceased production of bikes, and the Japanese multis were getting faster and more reliable, as well as highly sophisticated. But their day was not yet, and there was still room for a design based on simpler lines. In third place in the race had finished an odd-looking Italian bike. No faster than the Enfield, it had good road-holding and an indestructable power unit. It was a 750cc Moto Guzzi vee-twin . . . in Le Mans form it would often dominate similar events in the '70's.

Postscript

One Enfield-Metisse remained at Cr teil Motors where the son of the family impressed even the mad Parisienne drivers with its speed and handling. The other went to Toulouse, where the Enfield agent for Southern France delighted in blowing-off the locals in spectacular style, even impressing Wyndham Richards who stayed on for a few days relaxation. Meanwhile, Rickmans had become involved in negotiations to produce more Metisses for Enfield units,

the story of which has been recently told (issue 41. by the way Ian, you know now why the two French ones have different frame numbers. . . .). That Rickmans did not refer to the Welsh pioneers caused some friction at the time, though that is all water under the bridge now.

So ended a brave attempt; like Sid Lawton's Constellations ten or more years before, the potential was always there, lurking in that beefy, long-stroke twin. But other design problems stopped them winning and eventually time ran out for all parallel twins. It was all a great, great shame. . . .

DAVE HOLLYMAN

Nov. 24th 1984

