



Part one

Project Rickuki

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread – sounds like Scoop has bought another bike!



Measure twice, cut once; it was a phrase drilled into us by us our woodwork teachers. Actors are advised never to work with children or animals and we tell our kids to look before they leap. All of this and more is sound advice but us old classic enthusiasts are particularly good at administering the aphorism 'don't do what I do, do what I tell you'. Our own advice is based on decades of experience yet the most seriously affected of us rarely heed our own words of so-called wisdom.

There cannot be a year goes by when one of us classic journo types doesn't caution readers to stay away from someone else's stalled project. Why would you want to take on a job that someone else has capitulated to?

Not a year after the Suzuki T500R entered my garage I found myself looking at the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club's magazine, idly thumbing through the pages of bikes for sale and there it was: 'Rickman framed Suzuki T500 for sale, genuine Rickman tanks, seat, mudguard and tail unit. Completely rebuilt engine, Boyer ignition kit, Suzuki GT750J 4LS front brake

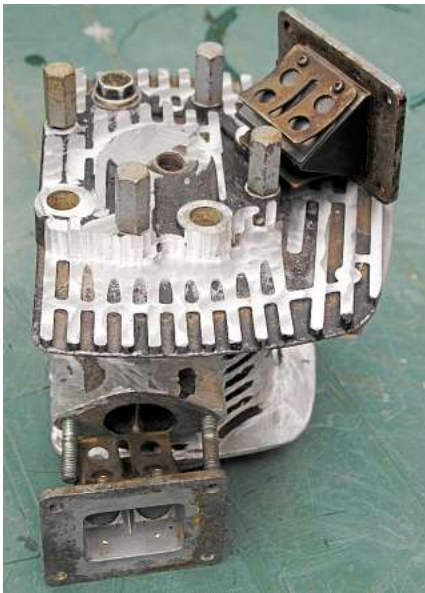
plus almost complete second T500M in parts.' Eyes already scanning the postage-stamp image, I read the rest of the advert and knock me down with an oily rag; the bike is only on the opposite side of town. Ringing the owner it's apparent he's a time-served automotive engineer by trade and this has been an ongoing project. However, a dodgy leg means he needs an electric starter now. Therefore the bike is up for grabs and the price is better than I'd dared hope for.

Of course, there are several reasons why the bike is a good price. First, every other sane person in the world is avoiding someone else's unfinished project because they actually have a grip on reality. Secondly, not everyone wants a 1970s cafe racer and thirdly no one has ever heard of a Suzuki T500 engined Rickman. So that's three good reasons why I should smile politely and walk away, but I'm guessing other CMM readers have been here before.



We're not sure why he's cursing himself. This could be really good.





Some of the parts that came with the bike weren't brilliant.

An unfinished project should, and for once does, sound some admittedly muted alarm bells. However, these are effectively and totally silenced when my mate Rob gets involved. Despite lacking a large number of the skills to complete the project I find myself being inexorably sucked in (or is that suckered in?) by his assurances that this is all doable. Rob promises to help, advise and fettle where necessary, if I provide the logistics and parts, locate specialists where necessary and, most importantly, finance the project.

We promulgate project plans, debate designs, argue aesthetics and chew over tuning. By this point the light bulb of logic should have illuminated but of course it's been dwarfed by the flames of fanaticism and I buy the project. I tell myself that this will eclipse the Yamaha RD350 Sondel Sport Shadow cafe racer I wanted when I was 19 and therefore the bike, subsequent outlay, and untold hours of toil, are totally, entirely and completely justified. Yes, this boy is that very fool who will soon be parted from his money; I know this but I still have to do it. Within a week the entire debacle has found its way into my mother's garage and unsurprisingly fills it up.

Talking to the bike's former owner, Peter Carter, I glean that there was already a plan from the moment he acquired the basic chassis kit from its previous owner. Hang on; another previous owner? I'm even dafter than I look. Apparently the frame had initially been modified/butchered/compromised/partially eviscerated to accept a Jota motor but the so-called builder realised it wasn't going to work. Peter wanted to fit in a T500 motor after seeing a rare shot of an American proddie racer back in the late-60s. Ridden with a fair degree of success, the bike had acquitted itself well at Carlsbad, California, with Don Emde on board. So with some



But there were lots of them! When buying a project, try and snaffle whatever spares and parts you can.

tenuous providence to justify the project Peter had slowly amassed parts; one and a half T500, plus peripherals. Thankfully the lash-up had been rectified by Dave Degens of Dredsa fame and the engine mounted in the chassis with welded mounts and alloy plates. The dry build had been progressing well until Peter's knee called time. Enter stage left Captain Numpty here with infinitely more ambition than ability. Yet despite the obvious pitfalls at least I have a vision of what could be, what needs to be done, and hopefully how to achieve a viable machine that's just a little bit different.

So the second donor T500 is moved on to my mate Andy Stevenson. Well he was a mate until he too realised he was buying someone else's failed project (spotting a theme here readers). I'm thus able to recoup a little of my initial outlay and gain some much-needed space. Finally with some room to move, the essentials of the project are inspected, and I have to say I'm quite pleased. Everything is in reasonable shape and there's more spares than I recall seeing in Peter's garage. Therefore, it's time to come up with a more coherent plan and a list of objectives. Sitting down with engineer Rob we come up with a list of things we'd like to do. The only issues are cost, viability, feasibility and access to the correct experts; apart from that it's going to be a walk in the park. It's at this point we realise the enormity of what we're doing and just why so many projects get abandoned. No man is an island and some of the tasks ahead are likely to need skills neither of us necessarily possess or can acquire quickly. Independently and jointly we come up with five key actions. Either great minds think alike or fools seldom differ, the jury's still out:

- relocate the spark plugs to the centre of the heads for better combustion efficiency and thermal management

- fit a squish band to the heads; it's an obvious thing to do
- fabricate water jackets for better cooling and enhanced performance
- locate some appropriate expansion chambers
- find someone to go over the chassis and its geometry
- consider fitting reed valves

The two ideas that really appeal are valve induction and water cooling. Neither is revolutionary but, both could, in theory, enhance the motor and potentially give us some increased performance. If we're going to do the job properly there's likely to be some porting going on that'll justify expenditure on some expansion chambers. Even if it doesn't, I like the sound they make, so they're going on. Rooting around in yet another parts cache I find some T500 barrels that have been carefully savaged by a metal eating pitbull. Hmm, water-cooled barrels eh? Looks like Peter was on a similar tack. With a set of reed valves donated by another gullible friend I reckon I have the start of a potentially interesting and unusual project. And then this little voice in my head says, 'Oh dear God what have I taken on?'

The one thing I have managed to achieve totally unaided is a name for the bike. Given that Rickman never intended the chassis to carry a Suzuki T500 engine I feel it's only right and proper that it has a name in the time-honoured tradition of part chassis and part engine. Rickman's original machines went by the name Metisse (French for mongrel) but I don't think I'm ever going to get away with that. Given my bike's amazing lack of pedigree it seems entirely apposite to use a time-honoured bastardisation of two names. It's half Rickman and half Suzuki. Ladies and gents; so begins Project Rickuki.

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