



**Part two**

# Project Rickuki

The euphoria evaporates as reality hits Scoop right between the eyes.



**S**everal months in to Project Rickuki and the enormity of the situation has dawned. Imagine waking up after a night on the town with someone in your room flicking on floodlights and opening the patio doors to a marching band. This is the actuality of buying into someone else's project.

With Project Rickuki and the like there are no assured positives; all that's guaranteed is heartache, anguish, expenditure, frustration, blind alleys, oh and more expenditure. It's no wonder so many abandoned projects appear on eBay. Already my initial plans have taken a hit due to costs and logistics. It's proved impossible to find definitive information on how best to mount the reed valve conversion we'd proposed. Getting this wrong would be disastrous – I only have a limited number of spare barrels.

Back at the motor, engineer Rob had taken the top end off the rebuilt motor and had a quick shuffy around (Picture 1). It all seemed fine but at some point the motor will be coming apart for a sanity check. We also have some cunning plans by way of lightening and

transmission mods. The desire to water-cool the head and cylinders proved too much, but I spent ages trying to find someone who could do it. Amazingly I kept being told that it would mean the bike was no longer eligible for classic racing despite my protestations that it was a road-going cafe racer.

Thankfully, via the old pals network, I hooked up with Steve Gagg of Ilkestone who didn't even flinch at the job. He does very similar work for guys racing scooter sidecar outfits. Steve G took my denuded barrels and set to with a will and a welder. We'll take a more in-depth look at them further on in the project but for now here's one (Picture 2) looking rather resplendent sitting on the engine cases. Exquisite welding and metal forming makes the finished article look like a factory prototype; I really wish I had such skills.

The original Suzuki cylinder heads (Picture 3) run a very old fashioned profile that does little for outright performance. A domed skull with no squish band and spark plugs significantly off centre is positively archaic. Steve Gagg's skills were again called into play and he relocated them centrally within the

new water jacketed head.

Thinking laterally for once I even managed to have a positive input into this part of the project. As standard the T500 runs an HS type NGK spark plug – typical of period – but that means it will always be subjected to greater heat exposure. By asking Steve the welder to fit an ES type spark plug aperture we'll be running with a greater safety margin and hopefully always be the correct side of potential detonation issues if we play around with clever ignition systems and the like. Simply put, the ES plug is longer, so providing it has the commensurate thread it dissipates heat better thanks to its larger surface area. Loosely assembled (Picture 4) there's little doubt that the final result is going to be something else but for now the revised top end is for display purposes only.

Something I'd promised myself from day one had been a set of expansion chambers; I love both the look and the sound. Looking around at various suppliers I kept coming back to Titan Performance. Run by Tim Hart and Paul Courbot the business supplies a range of goodies that anyone aspiring to build a T500/GT500 cafe racer based should



This greeted Rob when he took the motor apart.

seriously consider. They had some seriously tasty expansion chambers with the period look I'm after. If you remember the likes of Denco or J&R spannies you'll know what I mean.

A flurry of emails and phone calls confirmed everything I wanted to know. Having paid I eagerly awaited the courier. The resultant parcel had huge comedic potential and was hidden in a darkened corner of the house where it scared the bejesus out of Mrs C who thought Imhotep the cursed mummy had come from her. Oh, how we laughed!

My end game for the Rickuki is to make a rideable cafe racer that isn't all about mega top end horsepower. I want to enhance the Titan's creamy midrange, but expansion chambers often focus on the top end power at the expense of rideability. Titan Performance's chambers are modelled on a set developed by a T500 sidecar specialist who used to race at Brands Hatch. It's a track that demands torque more than top end power so the provenance sounds very encouraging.

After the wounds have healed, following the revenge of the Cooper kids' mummy, I unwrap the package to reveal sensual art in metal. I make no secret of the fact that I am in love.

In the not too distant future the whole ensemble is going to need some serious chassis fettling. If the bike is going to handle as it should we're going to need some expert input. Engineer Rod has already pointed out that the front end of the bike looks kicked out. He's been mumbling things like chopper and Captain America, so I can only assume we're going to be looking at some surgery that's outside our combined skills set. So we'll be needing a chassis guru with more than a touch of empathy for what we're trying to achieve.

At last an opportunity to put my questionable project bike talents to some use. I love researching stuff and I can talk for Britain, so at last I can contribute something other than organised chaos. There's a lot of more than capable companies out there, but



Smart! Thanks to Steve Gagg...



Original Suzuki heads.

what the project needs is someone who buys into my concept of end result rather than their own take on what a period cafe racer should look like. I want a bike that's fundamentally safe, so a specialist that will pull me up short on any stupid stuff I propose would be more than welcome. Cafe racers are by their very nature an amalgamation of compromises, but the end result needs to eradicate the worst of these, mitigate the majority of the middle ranking issues and knock off the rough edges of the 1001 little niggles.

After much investigation I approached Malcolm Shepherds of Metal Malarkey Engineering at a Stafford show. The quality of the machines is stunning and the company specialises in motorcycle frame manufacture, specialist welding, advanced design and development projects. They aren't afraid to challenge perceived wisdom to deliver stunning machinery that's true to its roots but with modern technology, thinking and reliability.

Two further key pieces of information convince me I've found the ideal company. Boss Malcolm was foreman at MRD Metisse, the company that took over the development of the road-going Rickmans and the company's frames were key to a project that took BSA Bantams to Speed Week at Bonneville and broke records. Excellent stuff and I feel I've found someone who isn't flummoxed by the more bizarre aspects of Project Rickuki. If Malcolm knows his Rickmans that's good enough for me. **cmm**

**THANKS THIS MONTH TO:**

- Metal Malarkey Engineering  
[www.malarkeyengineering.co.uk](http://www.malarkeyengineering.co.uk)
- Steve Gagg
- Engineer Rob



Dry fit shows lots of promise!