

15. Triumphs of the Spirit: A Tale of Two T100 500 Triumphs

To begin, I must first step back a few years to a point in time when employment in the US auto industry dried up and financial pressure dictated the sale of our 1966 Triumph Tiger 100 that had been lovingly restored by my brother-in-law, Vic Venti.



1966 Triumph Tiger 100 – Our pride and joy

This was the machine on which my grandson Joey had learned the joys of riding a British classic motorcycle. It was a heartbreaking step to take for all of us, but vital. For the first time since 1988 I was without a motorcycle, but young Joe kept me in touch by embarking upon a “remodeling” project on his 1971 BSA Thunderbolt, “Old Junky Bike.”

The beginning of 2007 was disastrous, I lost my younger brother in England to cancer, and my wife’s health took a sudden nosedive not long after that. Medical bills piled up once again, and by the middle of the year, I must concede that my own spirits were starting to sag under the pressure. That was the

point when my wife and grandson secretly conspired to hatch a plot that might bring another motorcycle project back into my life to help take my mind off some of the issues that were still ongoing. Joe and I took a drive to see a 1970 Triumph T100C 500 Trophy that had lain idle for at least eight years. Everything metal had corroded and everything rubber dry rotted. But it appeared to be 95% complete and restorable. I was so intent upon looking over the bike that I didn’t even notice Joe on his cell phone. I just assumed he was talking to his girlfriend, but in reality he was talking to his grandma about what we were looking at. About an hour later -- when I felt we had “wasted” enough of the owner’s time looking at something that I really could not afford to buy -- they struck.

Joe’s cell phone rang again, but this time he told me that someone wanted to speak to me. It was my wife, Rose, and she laid it on the line that she was aware of what we had been looking at, and under no circumstances should we return home unless this bike was on the back of the pickup. I explained that I had no money for this, not even a checkbook, but she demanded to talk to Joe. His face split in a grin as he pulled our checkbook out of his pocket and thrust it into my hand. “I’ve already got the owner’s agreement, Pops,” he said. “Just make out the check and sign it, and we’ll load her up on the truck!” Dazed and stunned, I dutifully obeyed my orders, and we headed for home -- “triumphantly” one might say.

To digress briefly on the “camouflage” aspect of Lincoln green: it takes its name from the old English city of Lincoln, the principle city of the county of Lincolnshire, famous for its history of the cloth and textile industry. It was here that, coincidentally, I was evacuated to from London as a small child of around 2 or 3 years old, along with my mother, to escape the German Blitzkrieg air raids of World War II. It transpired that this Trophy was, in fact, built in Meriden in 1969 but was not registered here in the USA until 1970. In ‘69, Triumph painted the petrol tank in a very unusual color, Lincoln green, a camouflage color.

I have a classic Triumph calendar dating back to 2005 hanging by my computer, featuring the 1969 version of the Triumph Trophy and fell in love with this color at first sight. I believe the verbiage was written by Lindsay Brooke.

The color Lincoln green became immortalized in the tales of Robin Hood, the legendary folklore outlaw hero who “robbed from the rich to give to the poor” and had his men dress in Lincoln green to avoid detection in Sherwood Forest by the evil Sheriff of Nottingham.



Work still in progress, but things are starting to shape up now. Wiring still ongoing petrol tank just propped, speedometer being rebuilt and numerous other details need attention.

Over a year has now passed, and we have been working on the bike as time and money became available. It turned out to be a major restoration project but is at last starting to look quite beautiful. We'll cover this in another article once all is completed and the bike is up and running.



A little background is once again required before I can tell you about the second Triumph, a 1969 T100R. Although my son-in-law Steve liked to come out for the occasional ride on my Honda CBX many years ago, when he discovered his son Joey's passion for bikes, like many fathers, he was not exactly thrilled at the prospect of his son having or riding a motorcycle. Many wars almost broke out, and a rift developed between all parties for many years of the last decade.

When it was discovered that Joe had a motorcycle endorsement on his driving license, all hell broke loose.

Within about a week of the family explosion, I was amazed one day when Steve called me up and told me that he wanted to buy a Honda VTX v-twin and learn how to ride it properly and safely. I drove him down to Ohio to pick one up on my truck, and Steve has become a “born again” rider. Last year, both Joey and his dad took the Motorcycle Safety Foundation course. The final day fell on exactly the same day as the Battle of the Brits 2008 show at Freedom Hill, but Joe still managed to get done in time to make it to

the last hours of the show. (He also picked up a second-in-class trophy for his lovely BSA Thunderbolt, Old Junky Bike.)

Steve has a little trouble with the idiosyncrasies of the classic British bikes, though, especially the reversed positioning of the rear brake and gear shift levers. Also, he is a pretty big guy and has a bit of a hang-up about dwarfing our comparatively small and compact Brit machines. So, dear reader, you can imagine my further shock and surprise when around last July he called me up once more to come out with him to look at a 1973 Triumph T100R that was up for sale locally. He told me that although he was set to buy it, he would hardly ride it since it would be more for Joe's use to accompany him on the occasional ride together.



In the background is Joe's dad Steve's Honda VTX, the little 500cc Tiger keeps right up with it even though dwarfed by size.

Well, after some feverish work by the seller, eventually the bike fired up. Joe took it for a test run, reporting that the brakes worked, all the gears were there, it didn't rattle too badly, but it was running pretty rough and refused to idle. Believing it to be a worthy restoration project, we agreed on a price, and once again a bike was loaded up on my pickup, and we all headed for home.

We quickly improved the running by making small adjustments to the timing and carburetor, but starting was still very difficult. What followed over the next few weeks included a top-end overhaul, front forks overhaul, and a total rewiring with a new harness. The seller advertised this bike as, "Runs great," and I must concede that the rascal was a great mechanic to have even gotten it to run at all with everything that was wrong it.



Tell-tale oil spots testify it's British and has oil in the engine. Once they are fixed, cosmetic issues can be focused on. Discolored exhaust bears testimony to how badly "Runs Great" was

However, it was finally decided that Joe and I would set to the task of finding out all the bugs and progressively correcting them while at least getting some riding pleasure. It was to become a sort of a rolling restoration project. But this was the Bike from Hell. No sooner had we found and fixed one thing, when we found yet another. Everything was at

the end of its limit of wear, and both Joe and I together spent many weeks of time and hard work just to keep it running. As the riding season draws to a close; this little T100 now fires up first kick and runs quite well. In fact, it has turned out to be a 'right little screamer' and even with a few items still outstanding, is a joy to ride. Up close, it still does not look that pretty, with zero cosmetic work yet having been undertaken. I think that the final thrill for me was one evening a couple of weeks ago when I heard the roar of a bike pulling into my driveway and, thinking it was Joe, was amazed to find out it was my son-in-law Steve aboard this Triumph. It was the first time he had ridden it out on the open road, and the gleam in his eyes as he took off his helmet told the rest of the story. As previously mentioned, he is a big guy, over 6'2", and Tiger 100s are small bikes. Because he had ridden dirt bikes in his teens, I told him to think of the Triumph as a road-going dirt bike, and we fitted the appropriate handlebars to suit, discarding the ergonomically stupid ape-hangers that were previously fitted.



Welcome to our wonderful world of classic Triumphs, Steve. It took a long time to win you over

but better late than never! We all have now spent many hours working together to refine and improve the appearance of this Tiger 500 and it continues to fire first kick, even in the Winter time, and the following photos show the gradual transition from 'The bike from Hell' to what is already shaping up as a very handsome looking classic motorcycle.



Before closing this little missive, I must pay tribute to some people without whose help and knowledge we could never have made the progress covered and would never have gotten as far as we did:

Vic Schultz, Bill Walker (QC Coatings), Don & Carol Gulbransen (Rusty Metal Cycle Co.), Peter Gareffa (MTR), Todd Ethridge (MTR), John Caruana (MTR), Gene Mutter (MTR), Mark Appleton (British Cycle Supply Co), and Mike Partridge (Waldrige Motors).

Extra special mention goes to my grandson Joe Taminski, who has given so much of his time and done so much of the work on both these bikes. These folks embody the spirit and essence of what classic British motorcycles and camaraderie are all about and I'm privileged to count you all as valued friends.

Addendum - Meet the Gulbransens

Article in Detroit Metro Riders Club Newsletter

Winners of the Class 6 Triumph Pre-unit at this year's 2009 Battle of the Brits show were Don and Carol



Gulbransen, with their lovely 1948 Speed Twin. They also set up their Vendor's Stand for the very first time and became members the MTR Club. When Carol approached Peter Miller and Rich Zanetti to enquire how much an MTR Tee shirt cost, she was told,

"Only members can buy these, are you a member?"

"No replied Carol, but I'd like to become one, who do I speak to?"

"Me! Do you own a Triumph and if so, what model is it?", quizzed Peter, the Club's President.

"I'm not sure of what models we have back home but we have just entered a 1948 Triumph Speed Twin in the Pre-unit Triumph Class today", chirped back Carol with a grin.

"That'll do!" came back their reply in unison. (Peter's such a smooth talker when he really puts his mind to it.)

So, a big warm, "Welcome to the Metro Triumph Riders Club" goes to Don and Carol Gulbransen.

I'm so glad I had the pleasure of meeting them both early this year in my quest for parts for my 1970 T100C Trophy project. They have been such a tremendous help and resource to both me and my grandson Joey that I cannot let this opportunity slide by without making other members aware of their membership and availability. Thanks Don & Carol. Don tells me that he has every bike he ever bought barring one, and that he even tried to buy that back but it had already been sold again.

Carol told me, "As far as Don's bike goes it started with a picture on his garage refrigerator, and piece by piece over 5 years became the bike it is today. All parts were old and rusty and he just one by one made them into that bike." In the short time I have known them, we have become firm friends and I have had the pleasure of visiting their home with Joe, out north of Imlay City, on quite a few occasions during the year. The name of their business is, "The Rusty Metal Cycle" Company, e-mail address:

carolg34@msn.com.

Roger Gooding (Word count: 2,084 words)