



Norton sales chief Bill Smith, with Bernal Osborne in the sidecar, makes a determined attack on the rocks of Silvermines—but why two fingers on the clutch?

# NOT SO AUDACIOUS —AFTER ALL

*Riding Bob Collier's "Scottish"  
Norton/Watsonian "250"*

By BERNAL OSBORNE

AUDACITY—that was the word we used in connection with the obvious over-optimism of some of the "Scottish" sidecar men when they weighed-in at Edinburgh with machinery which seemed hardly likely to get to Fort William, let alone last the week. As events proved, exactly half of them had to give up but among the survivors was the most daring of them all. He was Bob Collier, whose 250 c.c. Norton "Jubilee," in harness with a Watsonian "Bambini," seemed to be out of keeping, to say the least, with the arduous conditions of six-days' trial usage.

Was this one of the typical mad-cap ideas about which readers write persistently to editors; which bring grief and horror to manufacturers?

If it was—well Bob Collier's reputation as a reliable finisher must have stood him in good stead when he asked for the outfit. In any case, as a Norton sales representative he had access to the factory and knew that standing unused in a corner of the Experimental Shop was a fairly long-in-tooth test model "Jubilee." Might he borrow it? Bob doesn't say whether grief or horror was registered but he won the day and set about making up a Collier Special sub-frame to give added rigidity to the single-point fixing Watsonian s.c. chassis.

Combined with standard Francis-Barnett scrambles gears, a larger rear-wheel sprocket served to produce overall ratios of 8.0.

11.5, 19.4 and 29.5. The solo trail of the "Jubilee" was retained and a 4-in. back tyre was fitted without difficulty. Bob altered the layout of the twin ignition coils, which he also waterproofed, and used the boot recess behind the "Bambini" seat squab to store a reserve battery.

Carrying the flag of J. R. Alexander and Co., Ltd., who entered him, Bob weighed in with only one item in the mixed-bag specification missing—a steering damper. A damper would have obviated much hard work during the week for Bob. It would also have lightened my own labours on the Sunday afternoon after the trial when Norton sales manager Bill Smith suggested we might enjoy a canter together on the remarkable little outfit. My arms still ache!

The venue was to be Silvermines, a rock-strewn muddy gully where, before he crossed the border to seek his fortune in Birmingham, Bill himself used to compete. He is

still proud of a Scottish Experts' title and of solo rides in every "Scottish Six Days" from 1931 to 1950. But never a sidecar ride. Bill Smith's arms also are still aching.

But there was no lack of enthusiasm. Bill decided that there was only one suitable place from which to start the ride. Guess where? A hostelry called the Norton Hotel. Had the place been up at Stromness or in Skye we should still have had to go there. Luckily it was on the way to Silvermines.

To guide us in the sidecar art was Danny Gunn, one of the few top-line "chair" exponents in pre-war Scottish sport. With him was his wife, Joyce, and a lot of little Gunns (to make a crowd scene, said Bill), but if truth be told they had come to support the eldest son-of-a-Gunn, Douglas, who, 16 in June, plans to ride in next year's "Scottish." He certainly has riding style and ability which sales manager and journalist found hard to equal.





"Please, I didn't do it"—at least that is what Osborne seems to be saying.

For the first run through the section Osborne was delegated to passenger duty. A mean attitude on the part of the driver and normal good relations were further impaired by a bit of sheer funk on a planked footbridge where the passenger side of the outfit was permitted to topple dangerously towards the water while the driver remained safe and sound and able to scramble off the model as it tilted to 45 degrees.

Smith's Folly, we called that wretched little bridge. To put a stop to these I'm-all-right-Jack tactics places were changed. And then there had to be a spell of recanting. Hard words had been unjustified for, without warning, the outfit took complete charge and this time it was Bill clinging to the grab-rail for dear life.

Incidentally, this 1/2-in.-diameter rail had been bolted across the top of the glass-fibre windscreen surround, a structure designed chiefly to cope with such stresses as might be involved in supporting a canvas hood! Yet many times during the week I had watched passenger Gordon Wilde putting his whole weight on this little rail to stop the

The author of "Motor Cycling Electrical Manual" explains the sparks situation.

outfit looping; spectators and marshals had used it as a handle to drag Bob and Gordon out of trouble. It all speaks volumes for the toughness of glass-fibre and the strength built into this moulded surround.

The steering bias, of course, was a result of the buffetings and bashing suffered on hills like Mamore and in conditions where orthodox, high-ground clearance sidecar outfits had failed. All the way through Glencoe on the Saturday morning, I had followed the "Jubilee" and seen that the front wheel

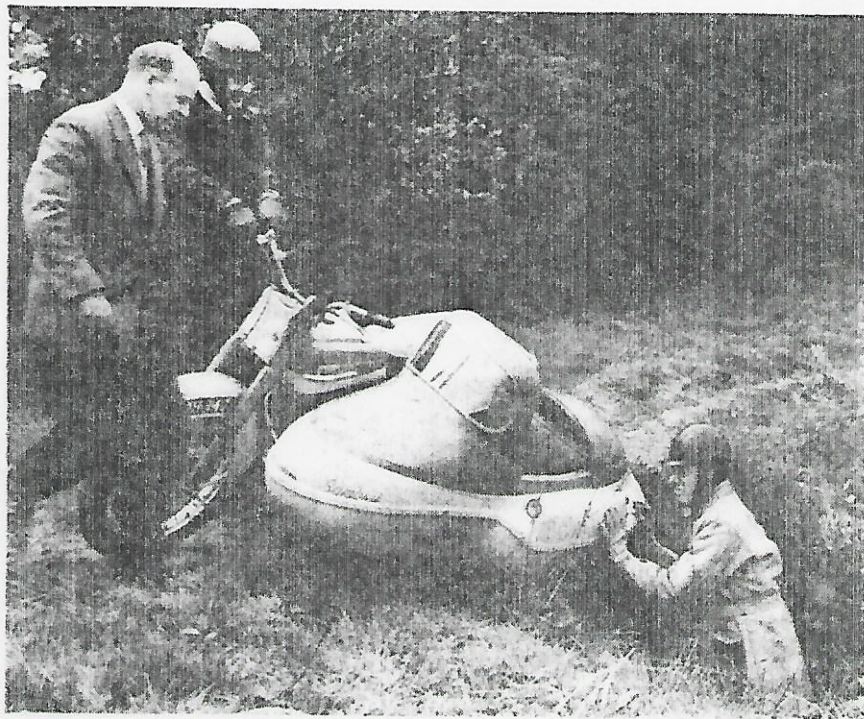
was stepped out nearly 2 in., due to a set taken by the forks, which were to the composite specification of a Norton/Francis-Barnett competition version.

Yet the whole outfit, after five hectic days, was still holding together and on the Saturday Bob, doubtless with a mighty muscle developed in his right arm, piloted the "Jubilee" at a cracking 40-50 m.p.h. (they call it the Glencoe Grand Prix) all the way from Ballachulish to Bridge of Orchy. He was seen to be braking early and using the gearbox a lot on this fast run. Our little outing showed why, for the standard brakes had taken terrific punishment.

Whatever long-term plans were in Bert Hopwood's mind when he designed this first-ever 250 c.c. Norton twin-cylinder power unit, six-days' trial going probably was not an uppermost thought. Yet now, with its high-mileage record on test work, plus the 753-mile Highland ordeal, the unit would come to life almost as soon as one's foot touched the kick-starter crank. Coil ignition, fed from a slightly modified Wipac A.C. generator, was still doing a 100 per cent. job. Everything worked and the gearchange (though the lever was terribly "streamlined") operated a box which might have been almost new, so slick and easy was the engagement.

Then it started to rain and the driver (or was it the passenger?) decided that Smith's Folly had suddenly lost its charm. In any case Bill had to tow the Norton back to Birmingham that night and so farewells were said. Young Douglas Gunn sadly watched us hitch up the outfit. He, certainly, had had a great afternoon. And we shared his enthusiasm in this venture.

Bob Collier had not been so outrageously audacious after all.



This would never have done for Bob Collier!

