

It was only in production for about four years but in that time more than 50,000 Norton Commando 850s were sold. It's spoken of today with respect and looked at with awe – does it deserve these 'accolades'?

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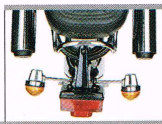
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STUDIO

Remember the saying: 'They don't build them like that nowadays'...

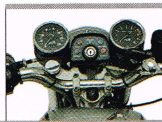
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TO THE LIMIT

It had a claimed top speed of 120 mph – justified? We'll see

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ROAD TEST

Then and now – on the road with the Commando 850

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EVOLUTION

The tale behind the 750 and then 850 Norton Commando

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RUNNING & RIDING

We track down some owners to hear what they have to say

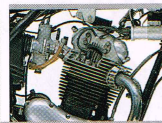
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CHASSIS

We take an in depth look at an older than average chassis

SECTION 8



ENGINE

A solid and strong engine – eventually

THE Norton Commando 850 was directly derived from the 750 model born in 1967. The 850 arrived on the scene in 1973 but there were hardly any changes made to it other than adding the extra cc. (The 850 was in fact an 828cc machine.)

An unusual – even unique – feature of the Norton Commando was what was called the Isolastic system which was designed to control vibration.

The engine and transmission (not forgetting the swingarm) were isolated from the rest of the bike by a type of rubber mounting and although this did work, the problem lay in the handling.

If that were not to suffer the Isolastic bushes had to be absolutely spot on in adjustment and this was a time-consuming operation. Because it involved using steel shims, if one got it wrong with the shimming the bike would be liable to handle poorly or get the 'shakes' – sometimes both.

Reputation at stake

The Commando also had a reputation for breaking crankshafts, destroying main bearings and blowing head gaskets and although these problems were later remedied it was too late for the Commando's reputation.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom for the Norton; it was a good-looking bike with a strong power delivery and, on the 850, the handling was not at all bad.

It had nice clean lines and, at 400 lbs, was quite light.

It had a claimed horsepower of 65 bhp at 7,000 rpm and a claimed top speed of 120 mph.

And more importantly it sold – and sold in huge numbers. Around 55,000 Commandos were built.

One year after its launch an electric starter was added to the Norton but was not that reliable. And four years after the launch of the 850 production ceased. ■

