

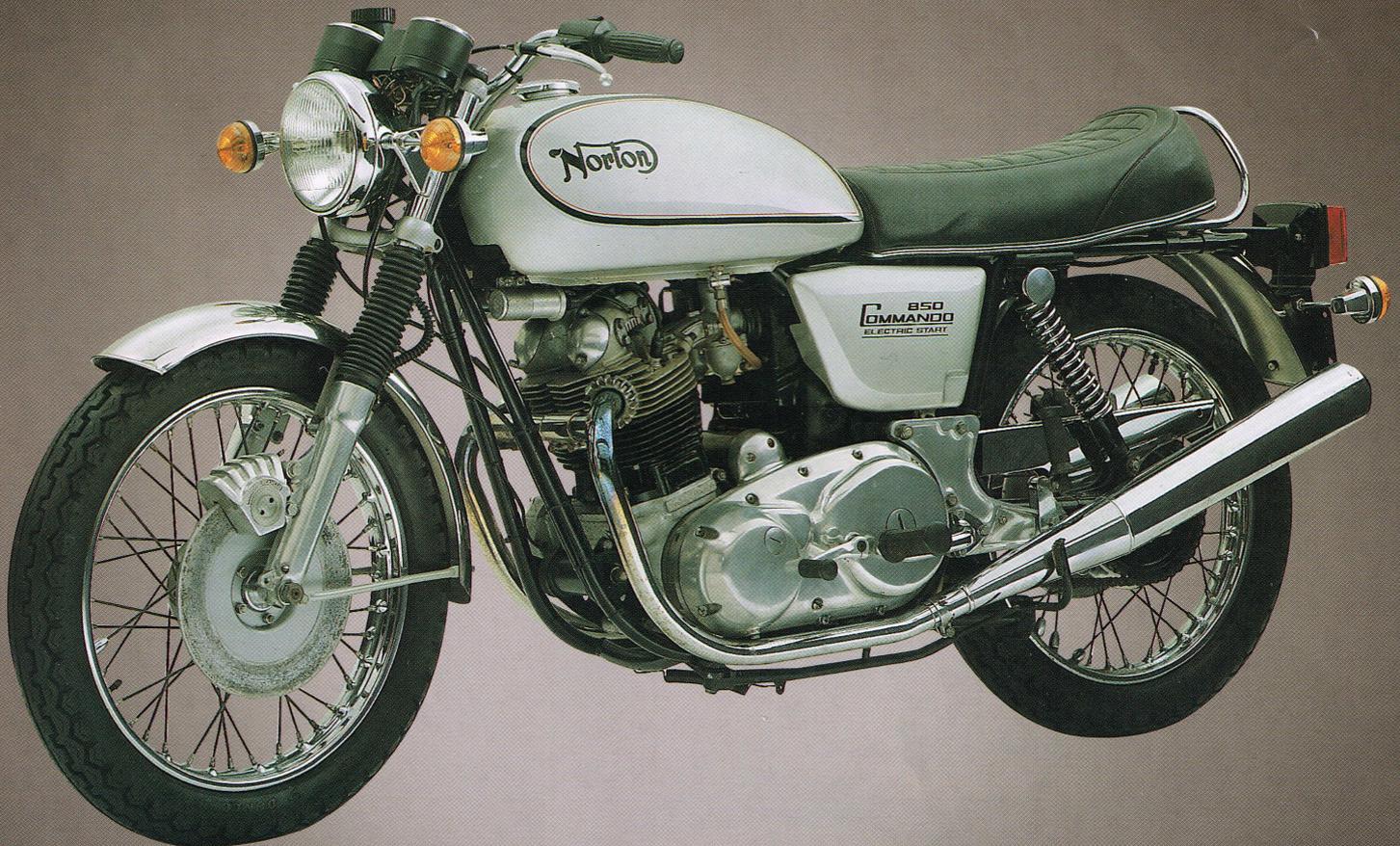


IN THE later Forties, spurred by the prowess of Alfred Turner's Triumph Speed Twin, practically every major British manufacturer developed a parallel twin of their own. Norton's first attempt, an in-line twin like the later Sunbeam S7, was rejected as being too unconventional. Jack Moore then drew up a more conventional parallel twin, but this, too was rejected.

In 1947 Bert Hopwood designed the twin that would ultimately become the Commando. Not surprisingly, it was similar to the BSA A10 for which Hopwood was also responsible, but unusual in having a single camshaft across the front of the crankcases. The engine was first shown as the Model 7 Dominator at the Earls Court Show in November 1948, but was not available on the home market until late the following year.

Public demand

Meanwhile the Featherbed frame was offering unprecedented level of handling on Norton's racing machines. Naturally the public clamoured for Featherbed roadsters, but their introduction into the Norton range was slow. The first such model, the Dominator 88 de Luxe first shown at Earls Court in 1951, was for export only.



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As an interim measure, swing-arm rear ends were grafted onto the old-style frames.

Eventually the Featherbed became Norton's standard frame, becoming the yardstick by which the handling of other machinery was judged. Indeed the Japanese were to imitate the design for a further 20 years. But in the fifties, if Norton had a problem, it was in developing an engine worthy of the Featherbed package.

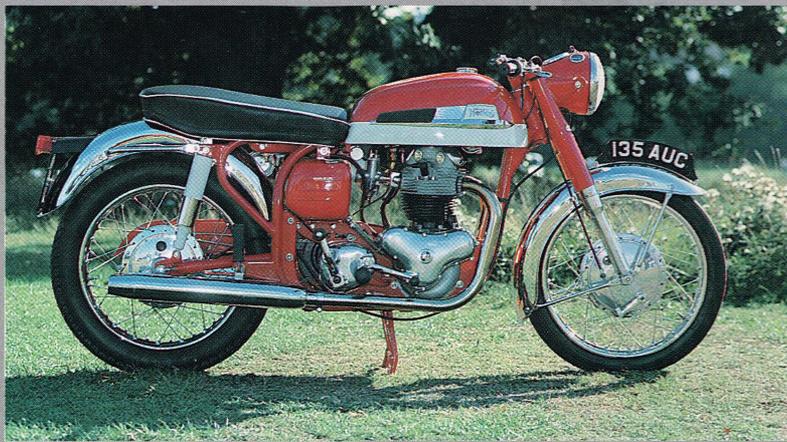
In 1960 an improved Featherbed frame, the 'Slimline' was introduced. Then, in 1961, came the 650SS, initially for export only.

Stiff competition

With comparable products already available from BSA, Royal Enfield, AJS/Matchless and Triumph (the Bonneville first appeared in '59), the SS had to be good – and it was. Early versions suffered some failures, but through it all shone that pedigree handling package. Ridden to the limit, no other production machine could come close. And with a top speed over 110mph, the new Norton was no slouch on the straights. Not surprisingly, the 650SS went on to win production races by the score.

Yet for all this success, these were troubled times for Norton, who had been taken over by AMC in 1953. In 1962, partly due to the failure of the 250cc Jubilee and 350cc Navigator twins, Norton production was moved from Birmingham to the AMC plant in Plumstead. The 750cc Norton Atlas appeared on the home market two years later, with the same engine appearing as the Matchless G15 under the AMC flag. In 1966 AMC themselves collapsed into liquidation. Norton Villiers arose from the wreckage to build the next generation of Norton vertical twin – the Commando – in Andover.

DOMINATORS



In late 1955 the 600cc Dominator 99 was added to its 500cc stablemate. It developed 31bhp at 5750rpm – an improvement, but significantly less than Triumph's sporting twin.



The Dominator de luxe 88 was the first road going Norton to incorporate the Featherbed frame – it was produced for the overseas market

