

NORTON ALA' VERDA

Daniel Delfour's Anglo-Italian Hybrid

Story by Richard Backus Photos by Pierre Leguevaques



"I built it for myself. I've been a Norton enthusiast for years, and I discovered track racing about 10 years ago. So I started racing with my road-going Commando, and very quickly I found faults: With its limited suspension and brakes, it's dangerous. So I thought, well, I must build my own."

Frenchman Daniel Delfour is hardly the first person to have had these sorts of thoughts: I'd wager many of us daydream about building a special of some kind, combining bits and pieces of favorite bikes into something uniquely our own. Something like Delfour's Norton Ala'Verda.

But instead of daydreaming, Delfour committed his ideas to reality, creating a machine that came perilously close to stealing the thunder of some 30-odd vintage Norton Manx and Commando racers at this year's Legend of the Motorcycle in Half Moon Bay, Calif., where Norton shared featured marque honors with MV Agusta. Talk about a tough crowd. Yet there were moments when the preserved and restored racers seemed almost painfully ignored, as attendees literally turned their backs on them to pore over Delfour's unique Anglo/Italian hybrid.

Delfour looked almost confused by the attention as he tried to answer questions as best he could, his halting English layered with a thick French accent. To hear Delfour tell the story, he didn't really do anything special, he simply built the bike he wanted.

Violin's first

A violin maker for 35 years, Delfour has been a lover of motorcycles since childhood. "The two topics



Owner/builder Daniel Delfour.





“ My main concern when I started on the project was to destroy nothing of the characteristics of the frame and the chassis. ”

A close look shows how the left exhaust valve inspection cap has been relieved to clear the Laverda trellis frame. Talk about a tight fit!



ESSENTIALS Norton Ala'Verda 850

Engine: 828cc OHV air-cooled parallel twin, 77mm x 89mm bore and stroke, 72hp @ 6,800rpm
Top speed: 130mph
Carburetion: Two 34mm Amal Mk2
Transmission: Close-ratio 4-speed
Final drive: Chain
Electrics: 12v, electronic ignition
Frame/wheelbase: Circa 1995 Laverda trellis frame, engine as stressed member/1,390mm (55in)
Suspension: Paioli 41mm upside-

down telescopic forks, adjustable preload, rebound and damping front, Paioli mono-shock with adjustable preload, rebound and damping rear
Brakes: Dual 320mm (12.5in) Brembo discs front, single 245mm (9.65in) Brembo disc rear
Tires: 110/70 x 17in front, 150/60 x 17in rear
Weight (wet): 155kg (341lb)
Seat height: 810mm (32in)
Fuel capacity: 12ltr (3gal)



I was interested in when I was a kid were violins and motorcycles. So it seems that nothing has changed for me,” Delfour says of his dual interests. Over the years, he’s restored a few Nortons and Triumphs, and then there’s his attraction to the track, which goes a long way toward explaining this build. Displaying a modesty that betrays the stereotype of Frenchmen as extravagant and boisterous, it takes some prodding to discover that Delfour is at the core of a loose-knit group of racers called Coyote Racing, and that for 11 years now he and his posse have organized a classic racing festival at Circuit Paul Armagnac near Nogaro in the south of France. Motorcycles, it becomes clear, run deep in his blood.

With a preference for British twins, his motorcycles of choice are Nortons, more specifically Commando twins from the 1970s. Thanks to previous build experience, Delfour knows how to make the Commando engine stronger and more powerful, so it was a forgone conclusion the classic Norton Commando twin would power any special he built. He started thinking about the idea seriously three years ago, but couldn’t decide on a direction. “I thought, well, I could build a Seeley, a Rickman, but there are so many,” Delfour recalls. But then, as often seems the case in such matters, the unexpected occurred.

“One day I visited a friend, and I saw this Laverda frame,” he says. “It was one of the very early ones [following the relaunch of Laverda in Zane, Italy, in 1993], the first issue of the 650, and only a few were made with this frame.”

Delfour lugged the trellis-framed Laverda to his shop and proceeded to measure it for a Norton engine. “My main concern when I started on the project was to destroy nothing of the characteristics of the frame and the chassis, and to try and adapt, so I spent a lot of time designing the engine plates,” Delfour says. “I kept all dimensional aspects of the frame, because I thought I’m not clever enough to design it all over again, so I

Resources

Daniel Delfour’s Site
www.vintage-motorbikes.com

Coyote Racing
<http://coyote.racing.team.free.fr>

Bator International
www.batorinternational.com



kept the original rake and trail, and the front end is as it came from the factory.” He even used the factory pickup point for the swingarm, although accommodating the swingarm was one of the harder parts of the build. “One of the problems in fitting an old engine in a modern frame is that swinging arms in modern frames are quite wide, and the transmission in an old engine is quite narrow, so we had to really push the engine to the left to get it to align, and it’s a very, very close fit.” A look at the left exhaust inspection cap shows how close: Delfour had to reshape the cast cap to clear the frame. It fits. Just.

Settling on a late production Commando 850 engine, Delfour gave it a lightened and balanced

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crank (four pounds less than stock), forged aluminum JE pistons and a Megacycle camshaft. In addition to ignition updates and a free-flowing exhaust, these modifications give 72 very reliable horsepower. Puny by modern standards, but more than ample for the quick sprints Delfour was looking forward to at the Circuit Paul Armagnac on track days.

Delfour had barely completed the Ala'Verda when a friend suggested he submit the bike to appear at Legend of the Motorcycle 2008. "A collector friend said, 'you know, this bike must be at LOM.' I didn't know what it was, but they were interested, so I thought, why not?" Delfour recalls. And what a hit it was. Combining new and old school elements with a craftsmen's



PHOTO CREDIT: Corey Levenson

LOM, 2008: "Ala'Verda" was a natural name, says Delfour, referencing Laverda, the color green and the bike's style — "in the manner of."

attention to detail, Delfour has created a singular interpretation of what a Norton — or Laverda — can be. **MC**

Post script: Delfour's Norton/Laverda hybrid garnered so much attention at LOM he decided to leave it in the U.S. — classic bike broker Glenn Bator (www.batorinternational.com) currently has it listed for \$65,000.

Design Works Vanson Leather