

A Grand Day Out

I awoke to a beautiful summer's morning, keen with the desire to ride my fine example of a motorcycle, my Norton Commando. I opened the garage door and inhaled the heady aroma of gasoline, oil and metal, the perfume worn by the Norton that I find so intoxicating. Today would surely be a grand day!

I checked a few points as any good rider does. Off with the seat to look in the oil tank. Hmm, quite low. It was probably a bit thirsty through the night, so I topped it up with the finest Kendall 50wt. Next, I swung out the kick start lever. Actually, better see to the lever as it has wandered rather far out on the spline. A quick adjustment, a hit with a hammer, retighten it, and now I am ready to go!

I turned the main gas tap on. Damn! The thing is so old and dried up that it practically snaps off in my hand. I will attend to it as soon as I return from my ride. Key and gas on, I prime the carbs. Whoops! The tickler is stuck down and gas is flooding from the right hand carb. Jiggling the tickler, plus just the lightest tap from my hammer, fixes it good as gold. I'm ready to go.

Key on, gas on, carbs flooded, a hint of throttle and a mighty kick. S@#! It hurts like hell when the kickstart misses a cog and you hyper-extend your leg through to the point where your shin cracks into the foot peg. I try again. Nothing! A quick examination reveals the ignition wire has fallen off, due no doubt to the vibration from the mighty engine. It's no job to put that on right. Key on, gas on, carbs flooded, bit of throttle, a mighty kick and VROOM! The beast roars into life.

I step off the bike to put on my helmet and gloves as the beast warms up. Oil begins to pour out of the oil tank cap. No matter, probably a sign of an efficient engine that just doesn't need much oil. The mess cleared up, I prepare to set off on this grand day.

I engage first gear, and the engine dies with a clunk. The clutch appears to be a bit tight. No matter, a quick session with the wrenches and we're ready. After restarting the engine, I engage first gear and feed power in from the mighty engine. We're underway. What a grand day this will be! I try to stop at

the street corner but coast right through. The brakes are no doubt worn from trying to reign in this magnificent beast. I'll attend to them upon my return. The sun is shining and I pick up speed and shift into second. The rubber on the end of the gearshift falls off. No matter, I can get another. I hit the open road, select third, then fourth, and the Norton and I settle in to a steady pace. The beast chews up the tarmac. Something goes POW on the right hand side and I coast to a halt beside the road.

There is an unusual tinkling sound, plus dense black smoke coming from the right-hand side. It is stinking hot so I remove my leather jacket and have a closer look. I remove the spark plug and find the electrodes jammed shut! Must have been a faulty plug. I shall speak to the guy at Canadian Tire as soon as I return. I restart the bike with the plug still out and a well pounded slug of gray metal spits out into my hand. The power of this engine! It spits out pieces it doesn't need! I adjust the plug, put it back in, and restart. It runs OK but idles pretty rough. Canadian Tire is really going to hear about this.

I put it in gear, let out the clutch, and the bike doesn't move. The master link has fallen out and the chain has fallen off the sprockets. Canadian Tire had better be prepared for a full dressing down. I install a spare from the small kit I carry in case of roadside emergencies. This kit contains spark plugs, oil, tools, oil lines, cables, nuts, bolts, fuses, an inner tube, the manual, wire, master links, alligator clips, carburetor jets, bungee cords, light bulbs, cable ends, tire valves and a rag.

The day is getting on and I did promise to be home in time to do some other chores. It's a grand day for it, too. I turn around and ride the two blocks back home, a smile on my face because I am riding a Norton Commando, the finest classic motorcycle there is. I put the beast away in its special spot in the garage, giving it a loving pat for such a grand day out. People who own Japanese machinery do not have any idea what it's like to own and ride a true classic. I pity them.

— Cam Norris, proud owner of a 1969 Norton Commando S

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