

THE LEGEND OF GUNGA DIN

By Steve Bond

In 1947, Vincent built a few motorcycles to go racing and one Series B Rapide was designated as the official factory test mule – to which all experimental high-performance components were bolted on and tested.

In a promising debut, factory rider George Brown raced the new machine at the '47 Isle of Man TT only to run out of gas while leading, setting fastest lap of 86.25 mph around the 37 mile course.

Charlie Markham, Motor Cycling magazine road tester, rode the experimental Vincent and realized that its performance greatly exceeded his own talent and nicknamed it "Gunga Din" after the waterbearer in Rudyard Kipling's poem. As in, "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

Over the next few seasons Brown won so many hillclimbs, sprints, and short circuit races that the catchphrase of disheartened competitors was, "Gunga Din? Going to win."

In 1952, Gunga Din set several endurance records including six hours averaging 100.53 mph 162 km/h, a very serious speed back then, as well as an Irish land speed record of 143 mph on public roads. By 1955, Vincent motorcycle production stopped. Harper Engines bought Vincent, sold off the assets, and gave the Vincent Owners Club access to whatever was left. They discovered a treasure trove of production records – serial numbers, files, parts drawings, etc.

And languishing underneath a pile of sacks in a factory outbuilding they discovered a motorcycle – Gunga Din.

The bike sat unsold until an American bought it for \$550 and parted it out. By the 1970s, an American Vincent fanatic had acquired most of the bits as they became available. He finally sold what he had to Vincent collector Keith Hazelton, who then tracked down everything else that was missing. Gunga Din remained in pieces until being sold to Paul Pflugfelder of Concord, Mass.

As recently as April 2009, the motorcycle was still boxes of parts, but Pflugfelder commissioned a high-end car restoration firm to reassemble Gunga Din. They had it ready for the Pebble Beach Concours in August of that year, and Gunga Din finished second to George Barber's AJS porcupine – the Holy Grail of vintage motorcycles.

SUPERSHOW Producer Bar Hodgson says, "It was offered to a handful of serious Vincent collectors and I'm proud that Gunga Din is now in Canada."

As a nice touch, the restorers left the dent in the special Monthery endurance racing fuel tank that was on the bike when discovered.

The bike has the rare Vincent racing magneto, prototype Girdraulic front forks, 32 mm Amal TT carburetors, original 50-year old Dunlop tires, straight exhaust pipes with 2-inch headers and many one-off components. Everything has been lightened and drilled, with magnesium being used on various components including the brake plates.



Here's how it looked in 1950

Documenting a race bike that was parted out through three owners over 40 years is difficult but Vincent experts agree that Gunga Din, as it stands today, is a logical conclusion of how it would be developed. ■



Here's how it looks today with new owner Bar Hodgson