



Building a "Featherlastic" Norton Part 1 by Bob Cox

This project began like I'm sure many do as an "accident" when I picked up a bunch of Commando parts in a garage sale. Included was a complete Combat engine which appeared to be frozen up thus my purchase for 50 bucks. It turns out the engine was not frozen but in need of a rebuild. It also must have been raced as it was full of titanium valve gear and had much metal removed from the rockers and crankshaft. So much was gone from the crank that Ralph Delmar suspected it to be some kind of dirt track set up - a quick revver without concern for "balance factor". Needless to say, I am rebuilding with a stock Norton crank because I am also utilizing Commando isolastics which are designed for vibrations at certain rpms. Captain Commando can tell you what happens when you alter the balance factor. So here I have a perfectly good engine, well good for a complete rebuild at least, and it has to have a motorcycle underneath it. As I've already built two Commandos something different was in order. I was impressed with a couple of "featherlastic" specials that I saw at the Red Rock Rally in Utah the summer of 2000. AMR Motorcycles of Arizona had succeeded in marrying the Commando engine into the slimline featherbed frame while retaining the isolastics and keeping the swingarm solid to the frame. The Commando mounts the swingarm to the engine/tranny/subframe which can be done on a featherbed but with a loss of rigidity. Now if you could get the performance of the Combat and the handling of a featherbed into the same package you would really have something - a ton up hands off classic that won't vibrate you to death. This is my intention with this special. It's also an easier sell to my wife as the motorcycle will just slowly appear in the garage (put that line in small type, Phil).

I have the engine well under way to completion, head being breathed on by Les Emery in England, bottom end together, cylinders honed by Mr. Delmar. I've built a tranny from parts also obtained from the garage sale. After many attempts at purchasing a slimline frame on e-bay, lo and behold, it practically showed up at my doorstep when Jack Herneupont arrived at an NTNOA meeting with one in the back of his El Camino. Front end is being sorted with Commando sliders, Atlas fork tubes and a TLS brake/wheel from Keith Martin. Swingarm is an aftermarket unit from Mick Hemmings that accepts wider tires. Rear hub is Commando. I hope to have the frame with swingarm and rear hub assembly ready to go to Arizona in the next month or so. In the meantime, I'll keep looking for parts and shopping the internet for more information and the many trick items that fit the featherbed frame. Stay tuned.