

FREEWAY FLIER

Legends are nice but performance is better and Norton has them both.

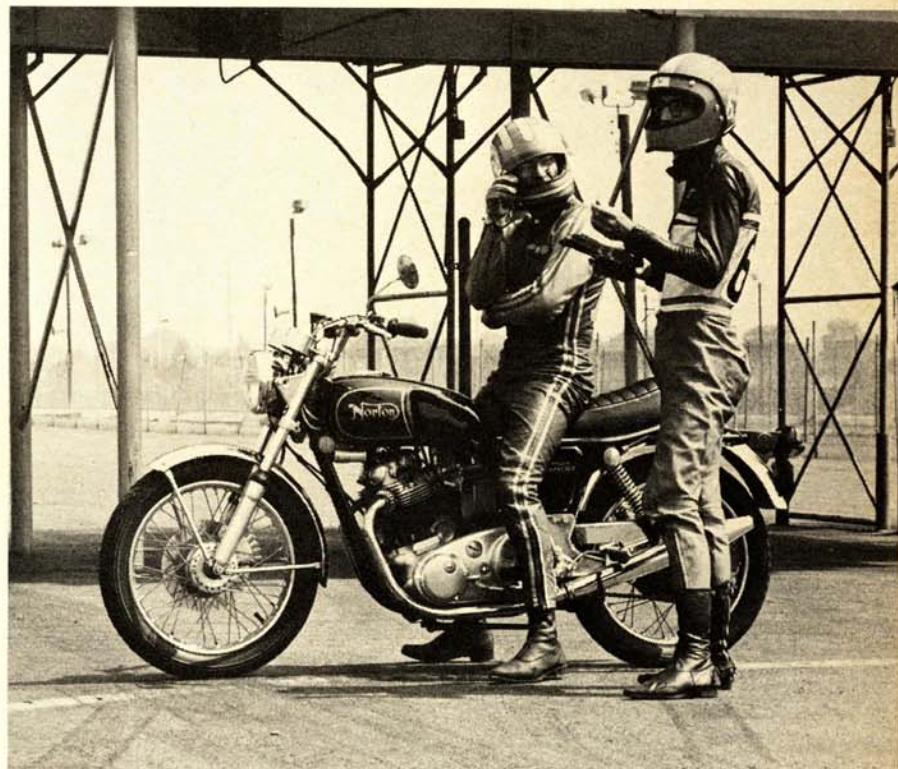
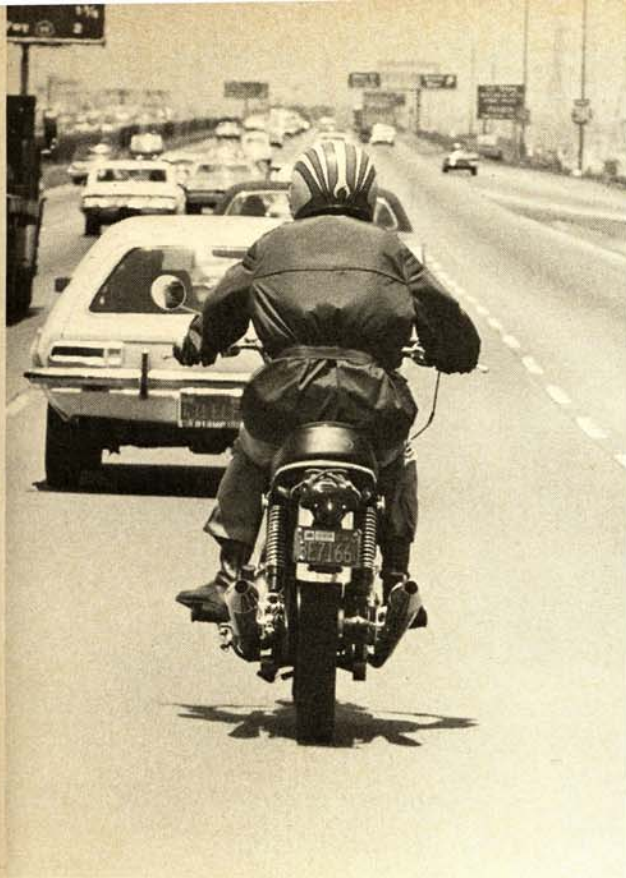
Racing success always has and probably always will create a following—one structured of varying intensities, producing the desired result: customers. The mystique built up about a winner is a natural spur to the consumer who wants to be associated with the victor. And the older that mystique, the stronger it becomes and the harder it is to yield, even in the face of adversity—the irrefutable fact of an unsatisfactory product. That's the nice thing about

the inexorable sands of time, the good things remain and get brighter and bolder while the bad times fade into distant corners on life's pages.

The success of Norton in European road racing dating back more than half a century created that kind of pervading legend. Most memorable of all was the Norton Manx, a 500 cc single. It was a boss mover in a time when life still had some simplicity. And superior handling quality was the greatest factor in keeping the Manx

competitive until its withdrawal from the racing scene in the early sixties, a victim of the multiple cylinder racer. That Norton handling was the stuff of which legends grow.

At about the same time the death knell for the racing Manx was being tolled, enthusiasts noticed a drop in quality of the over the counter product. A name that had been synonymous with good reliable performance and road holding ability acquired a bit of a tarnish. Well, a whole lot of



tarnish. But legends often stubbornly resist their own demise, and pride in a time and presence that once was can spur renewed efforts and success. The mystique, if not the on-the-street opinion of Norton, lingered on during its hiatus of sorts so that the name still conjured the image of a leaned over streak that tracked like it was riding a rail.

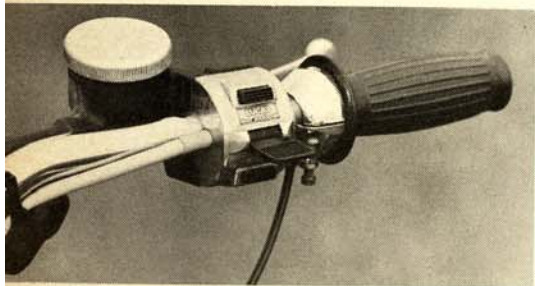
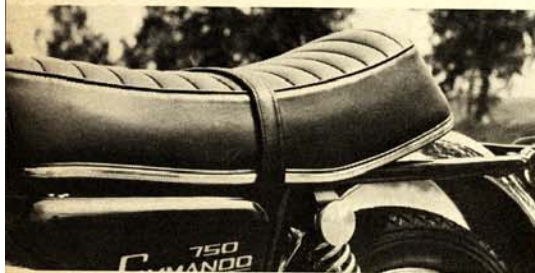
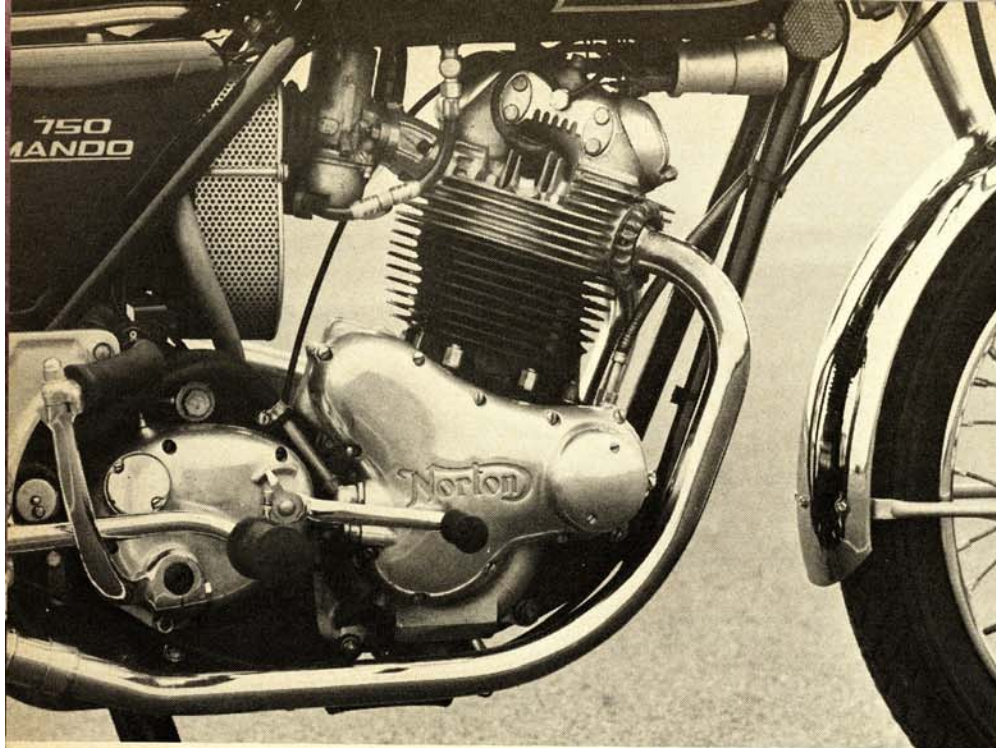
For the younger enthusiast, who may have been introduced to Norton after spying those ads with the fetching, sloe-eyed maiden entreatingly gazing out from the magazine page with an invitation to come and try us, history may have meant little or nothing. But whatever the instigator, a legend or a nubile lass, anyone who saddles the current product can touch

upon both bases—pride in a time tested name and satisfaction with an eye appealing contemporary go-machine.

The comeback really began a few years ago when the team of Beaur, Trigg and Hooper combined their talents to design Norton's exclusive Isolastic anti-vibration construction. This system joins the engine, transmission, swinging arm and rear wheel together as one unit. The unit is then insulated from the frame in three strategic places with heavy resilient rubber washers. A system such as this has a couple of interesting advantages. First of all, no vibration is transmitted through the frame from the engine—result, a super smooth ride. Secondly, the life of instruments and

light bulbs is lengthened. Also, because the rear wheel sprocket and countershaft sprocket are always in perfect alignment, even under heavy loads, chain wear is greatly reduced.

There is no doubt the Isolastic system utilized by Norton performs as well as they claim. At idle the whole machine shakes and jumps with each power pulse of the engine, but this condition is non-existent as soon as you twist the throttle. There is a small amount of vibration in the foot pegs at seventy miles per hour, but other than that, the Commando is smooth as glass. You can't imagine how gratifying it is to see only one image in the mirror at 70 mph or to be able to ride for hours at a time without having your hands and feet go numb



The 10.7 inch disc brake required a bit more pressure than expected, but delivered quick, fade free stops.

The 750cc OHV engine rests in a double loop frame. The cast iron cylinders help reduce engine noise.

The seat is attractive but too narrow for comfort. Excessive slope at the rear and the passenger strap also hinder comfort.

Although fully functional, placement of accessory hand switches was deemed poor. Horn, high beam and high beam flasher are shown.

Norton offers the best factory supplied tool kit we have yet encountered.

from vibration.

For a while we thought the near legendary handling qualities attributed to Norton over the years had come a cropper with this particular model. It took two trips back to Norton Villiers to finally diagnose the cause of the problem and effect its simple and complete solution. After having heard so many glowing reports on the tracking ability of the Commando we initially experienced a big let down. Before ferreting out the rascal, riding solo at seventy mph was a pleasure, but at seventy-one the front forks began to undulate with ever increasing frequency, directly proportional to the increase in speed. This condition was so bad it was impossible to get full potential out of this super bike

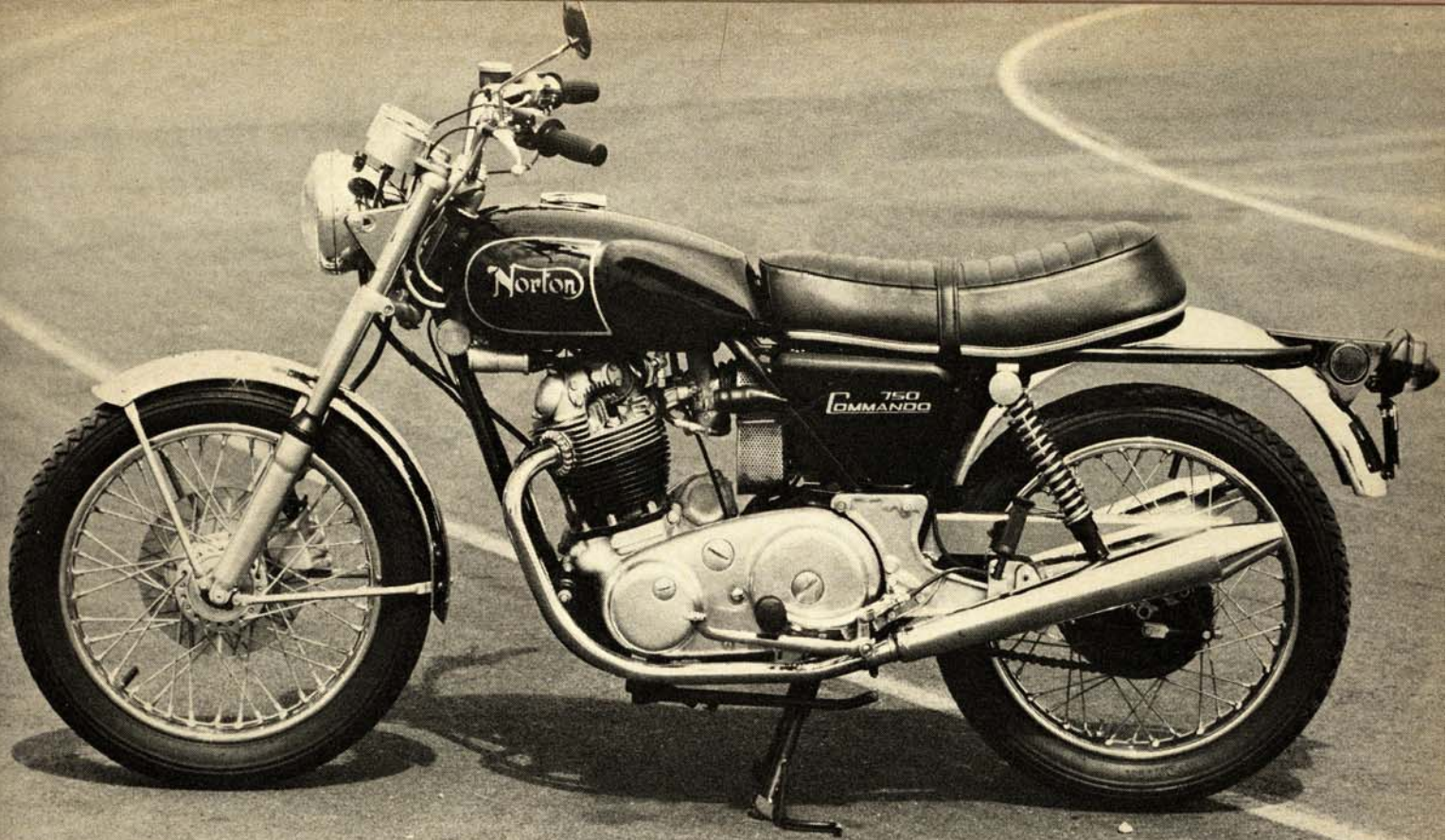
in the quarter-mile. After adjusting the tension of the shocks to the softest possible position we were able to accelerate to 80 mph, with the lightest touch on the bars, before this oscillation took place.

After this "hairy" experience we returned the roadster to Norton to see if they could find the cause of the problem. They checked the machine thoroughly for loose nuts and bolts, correct tire pressure and they even made sure both wheels were tracking in a straight line. To our disappointment they found nothing out of the ordinary, but we were told one of their executives and his wife had spent an enjoyable weekend riding the highways and byways and didn't encounter even a hint of a wobble.

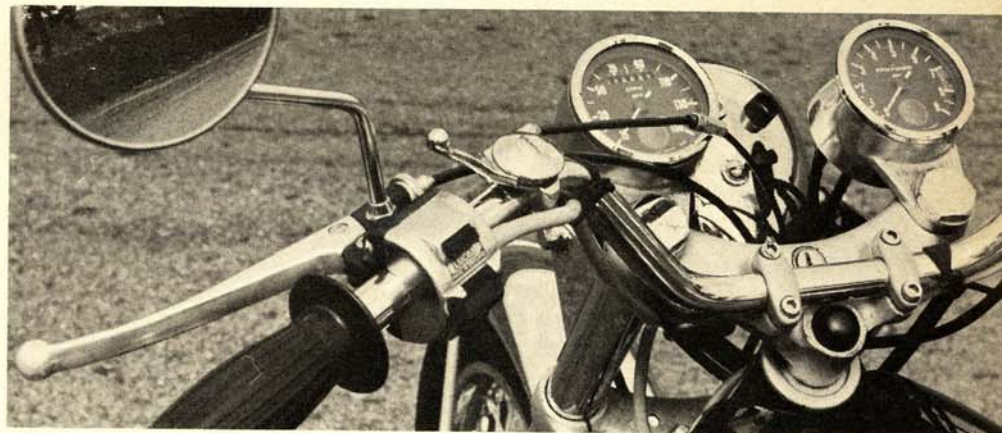
This completely dazzled us. How could an inexperienced rider run her wide open when we didn't feel safe over eighty miles per hour? Then we figured they had found something wrong and weren't letting on what it was.

Back out to the drag strip for one burst of speed and, as before, instant wobble. Now we were really at a loss. Just for the heck of it we put a passenger on behind, and to our surprise the 750 was rock steady. Imagine, ninety-seven pounds of passenger made a night and day difference. Speeds of one hundred mph and faster could be reached with no concern about losing control.

In view of the circumstances, we could only come to one conclusion.



Ignition switch is located just in front of left side cover. Note the side stand tucked completely out of the way beneath the exhaust pipe. Upswept mufflers give more than adequate ground clearance. Kill button, turn indicator switch (there are no turn lights) and electric starter button (there is no electric starter) are placed on left handlebar along with conveniently located choke. Speedometer is minus trip odometer.



After all, Norton had told us everything was as it should be, so who were we to argue. We figured that the added passenger weight increased the trail a fraction of an inch which stabilized the handling. On the other hand, increasing trail in this manner will also lighten the front end which you would think would lead you right back into the same problem. Needless to say, we weren't satisfied with our findings or our speculative solution to the problem. We made one more trip to Norton with hopes of finding the troublemaker. As before, nothing wrong could be found until, in desperation, the rear wheel was replaced. Presto, just like magic, the Roadster was able to smoke down the road at eighty, ninety and one hundred miles per

hour with one rider and no wobble. We found the original tire so far out of balance that it began to hop off the ground at speed, causing the front end to wobble from side to side. The passenger weight tended to hold the wheel on the ground. We are certain that if a high enough speed had been obtained with two up on the old tire the same wobble would have occurred.

Back on the street, with a balanced tire, the Norton gave a ride that can't be equalled by many motorcycles. The rear shocks are inclined forward at a considerable angle which makes for an ultra smooth ride. The front forks are just stiff enough to resist any nose dive under hard braking and also offer a good firm ride over any road.

These units topped out when putting the Commando on the center stand. This never happened while riding.

The 750 cc overhead valve engine is relatively quiet compared with other British twins. The cast iron cylinder takes part of the credit on this count.

Hopefully, in the near future, the 750 will be fitted with an electric starter. It would be an easy matter of fitting one just behind the cylinders, since it appears that the case is already cut out for just that purpose.

A broad power band, along with plenty of horsepower, makes the Roadster a very enjoyable and easy unit to ride in the street under any conditions. The power is smooth and constant under acceleration.

As with many large capacity four-



The double damping forks, dubbed the Roadholders by Norton, are an exclusive feature of the Commando.

stroke machines, a five-speed gear box could be used as a sales feature, but for normal street riding the four-speed was found to be quite adequate. The clutch and gear box are other areas in which Norton excels. Clutch lever pull requires little pressure and is smooth. Shifting from one gear to another was smooth as silk. The constant mesh gear box has four well spaced gears that more than meet the requirements of any road condition.

You and your next door neighbor will be pleased at the sound of the exhaust. It not only has authority, but it is one of the quietest four strokes sold. The two chromed, slightly up-swept mufflers give the machine a sporty look and do an excellent job of reducing noise.

Both side and center stands are tucked well out of the way of the ground. It was next to impossible to touch anything when cornering. The side stand is so out of the way that it is difficult to find when you need to prop the bike up. The Commando is easily hoisted upon the center stand.

Seating accommodations produced mixed emotions. The relative position of the saddle and handlebars is comfortable, with the foot pegs being a little too high. This is somewhat cramped but not unbearable. The seat itself is actually uncomfortable. It is soft enough, but it seems a little narrow to properly distribute the rider's weight. After a hundred miles we were ready for a rest. There is a seat strap provided for the passenger to hold, but it was located just beneath what for us was a comfortable riding position. This made it both awkward to get to as well as giving a bit of a lumpy feeling. One of the first things we did was to remove it from our machine. For the passenger the seat is really a sore spot. Not only is it narrow, but it is sloped forward at quite a steep angle, causing the passenger to always hold himself back so as not to crowd the rider. The seat sort of crowds two large people even before considering the forward slope. As with the rider pegs, the rear set is mounted rather high, which is another factor contributing to passenger discomfort. The seat, too, is relatively

high, making it difficult for anyone with short legs to touch the ground flatfooted with both feet. This height is actually good once you are moving because you have the feeling of being in full command of the Commando.

The gas tank is a sporty looking fiberglass unit which is painted in solid colors (blue, black, yellow, red, tangerine, purple, bronze) with the name Norton spelled out in modified Old English print. It is very simple but quite striking. Gas capacity is 2¾ gallons which is good for one hundred miles with some left over for reserve. Gas consumption was an easy to take forty miles per gallon. Running down the freeway wide open or cruising around town produced the same average.

The tool kit supplied with the Commando far exceeds the quality of those fitted to any other machine. Those riders who enjoy doing their own maintenance work will greatly appreciate the effort Norton has gone to in selecting the proper tools for this job. One thing missing, though, is a pair of pliers. That's easy enough to remedy at the local hardware store. Three cheers for Norton for putting together a tool kit the rider can really work with.

The front disc brake does its job well. We had the impression that a bit more than normal pressure was required to bring the 750 to a stop from speed. One reason for this could be the distance from the brake lever to the grip. The lever needs to be pulled only a fraction of an inch to actuate the brake. Possibly a longer pull would increase leverage and make stopping easier. The rear brake will get you by in a pinch but it isn't anything to brag about. It is our guess that nothing was wrong with this brake; it just works that way. Don't get us wrong; it does work but it could be better.

The two instruments, tach and speedometer, are located several inches apart. There is no mistaking one for the other but it is hard to read both at the same time. There is no trip meter on the speedo.

The chain, as on most large motorcycles, stretched no more than expected. Lubricant from the oil tank is dripped onto the chain to reduce wear and tear. The flow can be adjusted by pinching off the tube from the tank with the two hose clamps on the small filter in the line. Lubricating the chain in this manner does increase chain life, but also presents some problems. For instance, anyone riding as a passenger should wear either old clothes or something dark to hide all the oil spots. As the chain rotates it throws oil all over the rear of the motorcycle

and passenger. Also, a big puddle of oil is left on the ground because the chain oiler keeps siphoning from the oil tank after killing the engine. Norton is working on a check valve to stop this drain problem but until then get used to the puddle. Actually we suggest not using the chain oiler. Instead, carry some good chain lube with you and lube the chain at every gas stop. Its just a little more trouble, but it will increase chain life and hopefully keep your passenger clean.

Electrics on the Norton are of course by Lucas. In the past that wouldn't be saying anything. Today, now that the dealers are more aware of proper maintenance techniques and the improvement in quality, Lucas electrics are among the finest. The headlight illuminates the road quite well and affords good visibility at all times. The taillight is easy to see from behind and the difference between it and the brake light, even during the day, is quite distinguishable.

The balance and feel of the Roadster is very good. It handles like a dream and can be flicked from side to side with ease. This is no doubt due to the steering geometry and weight. Norton's 750 is the lightest super bike on the market weighing in at about 390 pounds.

Nortons have traditionally been fitted with Avon tires, but sales have increased to the point where Avon can't meet Norton tire needs. It is now possible to buy any of the Norton 750's with either Dunlop or Avon tires, 4.10x19 front and rear. We feel the K81 Dunlop tire is superior to anything sold for the street. We also think the Avon is a good tire but doesn't offer the traction and wear that the K81 does.

The quality of the Norton has steadily improved over the past few years. Perhaps Norton's finest feature is the almost total lack of engine vibration. Until one experiences the featherbed ride the Commando offers, it is difficult to express just what he is missing. It is definitely one of those try it, you'll like it situations.

Straight ahead freeway fliers will experience only one of the Commando's two major assets—the vibration free ride. They miss out on its super handling. With its light weight and strong double cradle frame the bike is as agile as a gazelle over the most demanding mountain road.

There is no doubt the Commando Roadster is a true super bike. It is light, fast, handles well and is vibration free. We feel certain that anyone looking for one or more of these qualities should take a close look at any one of the Commandos.

Bob Braverman/Walt Fulton Jr.



NORTON 750 ROADSTER

ENGINE

Type	two cylinder ohv four stroke
Bore and stroke	73x89mm (2.88"x3.5")
Displacement	745cc
Compression Ratio	10.1:1
Max. horsepower	65 @ 6800 rpm
Ignition	6v coil
Carburetion	two 32mm Amal
Lubrication	dry sump

DIMENSIONS

Length	87.5 in.
Seat height	31 in.
Wheelbase	56.75 in.
Ground clearance	6 in.
Dry weight	395 lbs.

WHEELS AND BRAKES

Front tire size	4.10x19 in.
Front brake type	disc, 10.7 in.
Rear tire size	4.10x19 in.
Rear brake type	internal expanding 7 in.
Tire pressures	25-29 psi

TRANSMISSION

Type	4-speed constant mesh
Clutch	dry multi plate
Internal gear ratios	1st, 2.56:1; 2nd, 1.7:1; 3rd, 1.22:1; 4th, 1:1
Final ratio	4.84:1
Countershaft sprocket	19
Rear wheel sprocket	42

PERFORMANCE

Indicated highest one-way speed	109.5 mph
Acceleration 0-60	7.0 sec.
Braking distance 30-0	29.6 ft.
Quarter-mile acceleration:	
Top speed	103.68
Elapsed time	13.09

GENERAL

Air filtration	dry paper
Battery type	12v

CAPACITIES

Fuel tank	2.75 gal.
Fuel reserve	2.5
Oil tank	6 pts.
Gear box	1 pt.
Fuel consumption	40 mpg

FRAME AND SUSPENSION

Front suspension	telescopic hydraulic double damping forks
Rear suspension	adjustable shocks
Frame type	double cradle

COLORS

Black, blue, purple, bronze, red, orange, yellow

DISTRIBUTOR

Norton-Villiers
6765 Paramount
N. Long Beach, CA.

PRICE AS TESTED

\$1,784 FOB West Coast