

* CWG (BILL) LACEY *

My late father used to mention Bill Lacey in connection with the tuning of Norton engines. Father was never connected with motorcycles, but prepared road cars for club level competition and fast road use, including a drophead Morris 8, which was tuned and supercharged with the help of Bill Lacey. It was difficult to start when warm and I remember as a small boy, one particular shopping trip with my mother. Ready to go home, we returned to the Morris but it wouldn't start; we walked the two miles home with heavy bags, and the Morris soon disappeared from our garage! I do hope you will be able to shed some light on Bill Lacey.

Michael James, Worcestershire

* *Bill Lacey was, along with the likes of Francis Beart, Bert Le Vack, Ted Barragwanath and Joe Potts (to name a few), one of the great motorcycle tuners of the 20th century. Of course, Norton wizard Steve Lancefield was in this group too, but hated being called a tuner, preferring to be known as a 'racing motorcycle engineer.' But as well as being a leading tuner, Lacey was a brilliant Brooklands racer and world record holder too, astride machines he'd built and prepared.*

Born at the turn of the last century, Bill Lacey first appeared at Brooklands in 1922 riding a 499cc Rudge Multi, gaining his first win two years later in 500cc Junior Handicap race at 81.91mph astride a 344cc Cotton. Wins and top places became a habit but Bill was noteworthy for another habit; immaculate preparation, not only of his motorcycles but also himself. Never seen in threadbare clothing and covered in grease (Ted Barragwanath's usual 'uniform!'), Lacey was 'natty' both on and off the track.

Weighing 8½ stone, small of stature but tough, Bill Lacey was the ideal racer. Aboard his immaculate 344/498cc Grindlay Peerless JAPs, including the famous nickel plated example, Lacey became internationally renowned for his achievements in the late-Twenties and again in the early-Thirties, by them with Nortons.

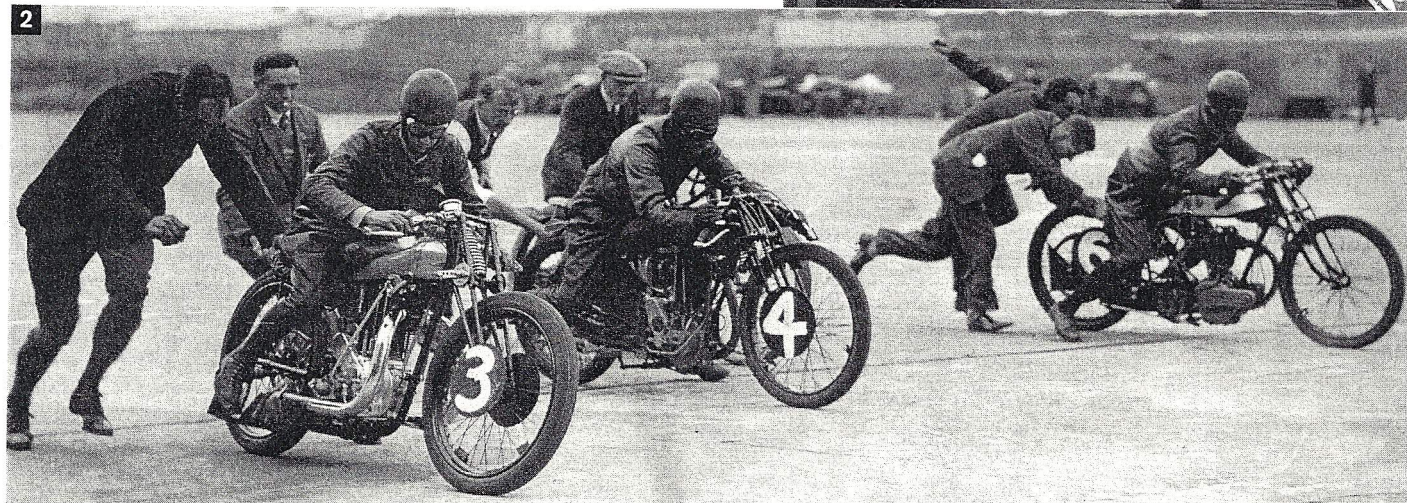
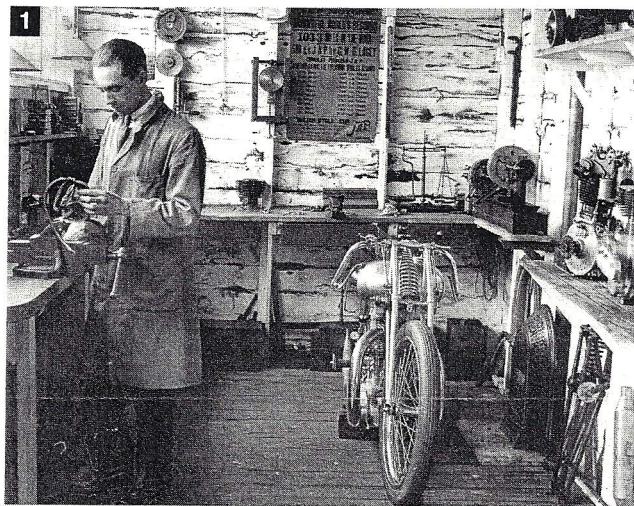
Winning his coveted Brooklands Gold Star (awarded for a rider's first 100-plus mph lap in a given class) in 1927 (498cc Grindlay Peerless) he hit the headlines in a big way in 1928 by becoming the first rider to pack over 100 miles into one hour, riding a 500 on British soil. At Brooklands, the 498 Grindlay Peerless covered 103.90 miles in the hour for an FIM world record. Bert Denly (AJS) wrested it away in early August 1929 at Monthéry but, only weeks later,

Lacey had his record again at 105.87mph, also at Monthéry. He took the record for a third time, again at Monthéry, in 1931, covering 111.45 miles in the hour astride a Norton.

Following retirement from racing, Lacey concentrated on running his successful precision engineering business, based for many years in Slough. He tuned both car and motorcycle engines for customers and friends. After retirement from business in the Fifties he was 'persuaded' to race prepare motorcycle engines included the Comerford entered Nortons for John Hartle and, even more notably, Stan Hailwood secured his services for his up and coming son Mike.

Young Hailwood's stable included Norton, FB Mondial and NSU Sportmax, all prepared by Bill Lacey, by then was assisted by his daughter Ann. The highest achievement of the collaboration was Mike Hailwood's 1961 Senior TT win riding a Lacey tuned Norton, a machine which had more Lacey than Norton in the engine, including revised main bearings/housings and a modified Jaguar con-rod.

After the success, Bill Lacey again retired from motorcycling, this time to concentrate on race car engine preparation, especially GP units. Ever enthusiastic for new challenges, Bill learnt to fly a microlight aged 85. Living his life in mind of the saying; 'no finish, no win' which should have perhaps been the epitaph for this small giant, who died in November 1989 aged 88 years.



1. Bill Lacey at work in his workshop, in 1928. His immaculate Grindlay-Peerless JAP sits ready for the next record attempt.
2. In action on the Grindlay-Peerless, in 1926. The other two identifiable riders/machines are Gordon Cobbold (Sunbeam) and Pat Driscoll (Norton).