



Far from home

Often a motorcycle will have a convoluted journey from point of origin to eventual home... US reader Alan Singer has just such a tale.

Words and pics: Alan Singer
Additional material: Mortons Archive

Though not exactly common in the UK there were certainly more Sammy Miller High-Boy frames in use there than here in the United States. In fact my research after buying this Millerised Bultaco on an internet auction site turned up only two others in North America. I'd spotted the bike by chance on the auction site, there were no bids on it, so for a lark – I'd not got a project on the go at the time – I put in the minimum bid which won me the auction.

It was only 100 or so miles away and when I went to see it the description was accurate so I paid up and came away with a well-used 325 Bultaco Sherpa which on the plus side actually ran. Also useful were a number of original documents with the bike which included a bill of sale from John Lee Motorcycles and the UK registration document.

Above: The finished bike on show at MotoEuro Garage.

Below: Seat re-covering was by Sargent Cycle Products.

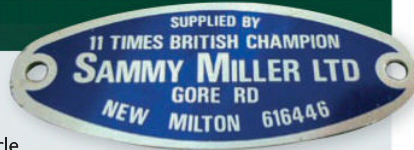


My first task was to find out as much information as possible while stripping and cleaning the bike. I took lots of photographs during the strip-down as most people doing the same as me will know memory often fails and a photograph will show the original way a piece went together months later.

MOTOEURO GARAGE

MotoEuro Garage is a private, non-profit organisation dedicated to the preservation and restoration of significant European motorcycles. In addition, it provides a broad range of services, ranging from tour planning to website development. These are provided free as a function of meeting its mission.

SAMMY MILLER LTD



As well as being a top trials rider and development engineer Sammy Miller also opened up a retail motorcycle business in the Sixties and began manufacturing special parts for the trials world. One of his developments was a frame for Bultaco models which, thanks to him having access to higher quality tubing unavailable to the factory at the time, was lighter and stronger. Replacement of the tubes under the engine with an alloy plate instantly gained ground clearance as well as providing a smoother underside to slide over obstacles. When matched with the rest of his Bultaco goodies the result was a machine – in 250cc form at least – a full 28lb lighter than standard. *MotorCycle's* man Peter Fraser tested this special machine in September 1971 and was mightily impressed.



What I learned was the original Sherpa was purchased in 1975 – by which time Miller was working with Honda rather than Bultaco – the High-Boy frame is from the second series of production. The chrome plating was still okay but needed much cleaning and polishing to bring it up to a reasonable spec. The engine too was in decent condition inside and more – a lot more – polishing of the external bits and barrel painting produced a nice looking engine unit to fit back into the frame. The forks too were in good internal condition and once stripped, polished and rebuilt went back into the frame.

Above: The tank took expert work to bring it up to this standard.

Top right: A period advert for the frame.

Right: From this angle the slimline look of the Sherpa is clear.

Below: Work in progress.

Not quite so good were the wheels and initially it seemed all they would require was a few spokes replacing and some cleaning. After busting many a knuckle on the hub and rim trying to clean the wheels up intact I eventually realised they would need stripping and rebuilding as some of the spoke holes had been damaged. In the end though the wheels came up really well.

Hardest job of all during the build eventually turned out to be the fenders. Every possible fender problem which there could be had happened to these ones. They were split, twisted, compressed and the bolt holes were misshapen too. They were beyond saving but I managed to find a pair of replica M199 fenders and front brackets which made the bike look great.

During my research I also learned in 1973 the UK Government banned the use of glass fibre gas tanks on motorcycles apparently after a series of incidents involving badly made tanks sold for the café racer craze. These tanks would split or crack or disintegrate if the bike was in an accident; whichever problem, it ended up with several gallons of gas being dumped on hot engines... The Bultaco importers ▶





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THE STORY

Colin Blake's early trials experiences as a teenager were on a Tiger Cub and a well-used Bultaco Sherpa, on which machines he showed a bit of talent. His dad bought a 325cc Bultaco M151 from John Lee Motorcycles of Wellingborough, Northants for £636 and subsequently built it into a Sammy Miller High-Boy frame. Colin competed on it for a couple of years, including at the Isle of Man Two Day Trial and was a nationally ranked junior rider. The Bulto

remained with Colin even after several moves – first to France and later when he emigrated to New Hampshire in the US. His son rode it a bit but mostly it was unused. In 2005, with an impending move to the Pacific Northwest on the cards, he sold it locally to Brad Marshall. Brad says he rode it only once, it ran out of fuel and he parked it. Brad moved to Florida and passed it on there to Don Jacobs, from whom Alan Singer bought it a couple of years later.



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Top left: Assembly continues.

Left: The motor cleaned up well.

Right: Assembly is always an exciting time.



had to accept bikes from the manufacturer with gas tanks which prevented their use on the highway. In those days most UK trials had stretches of highway included so the importers had to do something. What they did was to contact Homelite in Birmingham and have batches of alloy tanks made to comply with the UK law. These gas tanks were light, thin and easily damaged and the repair of this one was beyond my ability but a friend with a bodyshop tackled the work and did a great job which included painting it in a shade of British Racing Green which was actually a Seventies Porsche colour. I repaired the seat pan

myself and had Sargent Cycle Products re-cover it from a Kit Campeon template and the whole tank seat unit looks very good.

From start to finish the project was five months in duration and turned up lots of odd things such as the fasteners being a mix of Whitworth and metric. Wherever possible I drilled and retapped thread sizes to metric dimensions to make life easier though in truth the bike went back together quite easily. It is also true the project cost a bit more than my initial rosy estimate but I guess every project is the same in this respect. However I'm happy with the result. **cdb**

Below: Almost finished, just a few bits and pieces to do.

