

THE VINTAGE JAPANESE MOTORCYCLE MAGAZINE



Deceptive R5

Inside:

- TX500 goes 'all out'
- VJMC show reports
- Goldwing carbs compared
- Hundreds of classifieds

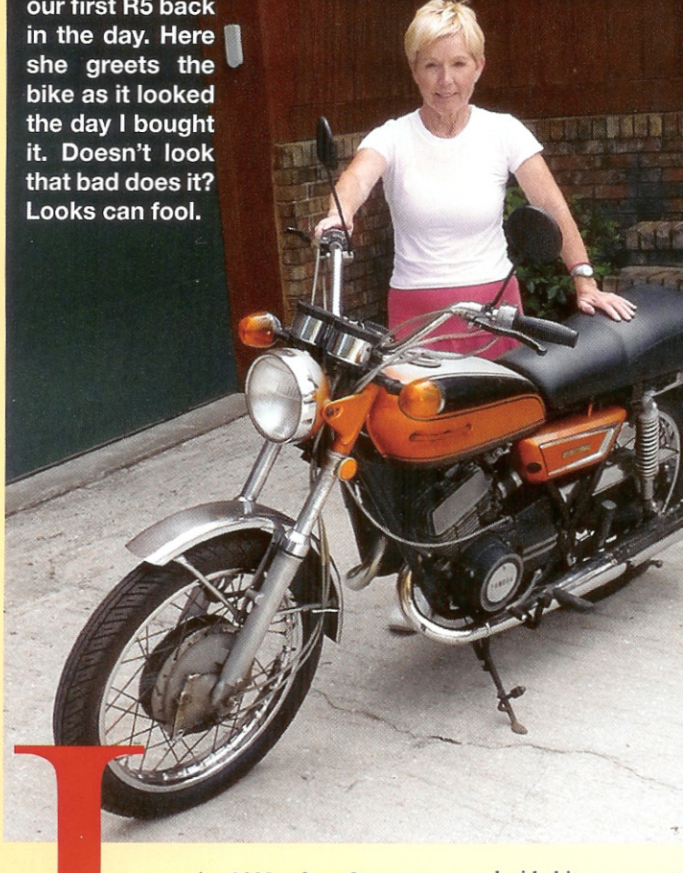


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COVER STORY

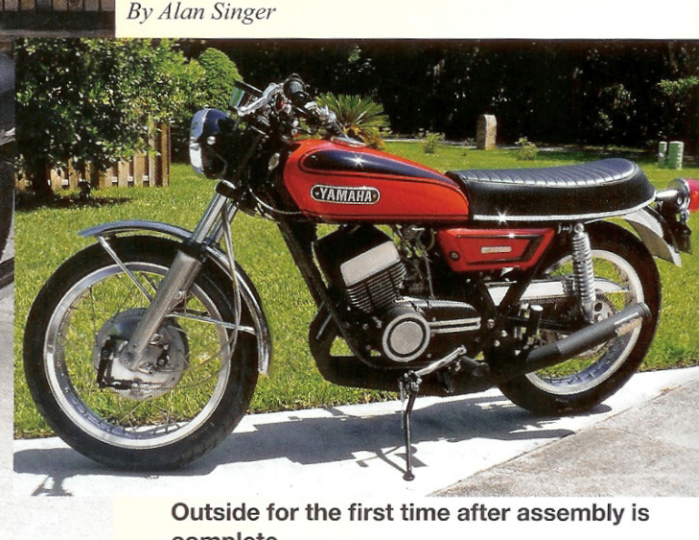
My wife, Terri, rode two-up on our first R5 back in the day. Here she greets the bike as it looked the day I bought it. Doesn't look that bad does it? Looks can fool.



RESURRECTING A 'STROKER'

R5 had plenty of hidden problems

By Alan Singer



Outside for the first time after assembly is complete.

In spring 2009, a few of us were at Stetson University in Deland, Fla., during Bike Week, manning a booth at the annual swap meet and auction. We were selling T-shirts and posters promoting our charity motorcycle concours, Riding into History. My lifelong friend Neil Fogelberg came back from a walkabout and told me to check the row of rusty barn finds stuffed into a corner of the basketball arena.

There it was, a 1972 Yamaha R5C. Just like the first "big bike" I ever owned. The one I cruised North Jersey on. The one that, with my 100-lbs. bride on the back, would either stall or wheelie at every light. The one that got away.

Nearly 40 years on, I've become something of a minor collector and am now, through rose-tinted glasses, seeing a way to go home again. The bike looked complete. It didn't appear to have been modified, had original faded paint and pipes; only the seat cover has been (badly) replaced. Consulting with Neil and his co-conspirators,

we decided it was a pretty decent example and worthy of restoration. We agreed that about \$500 would be a fair price.

The auction started with the sales of many bike parts lots, then the barn bikes, before getting into the valuable stuff. As the barnies came up to the block, a rusty, incomplete Kawasaki H2 with smashed pipes sold for \$750. I figured there is no way the R5 would go for less than that. The R5 quickly hit \$350, looking for \$375; I tossed in a \$400 bid and put on my best I'm-winning-this-sucker look. It worked and I now own it.

In the truck and homeward bound, I called Buddy Viitt, our local Yamaha 350/650 guru. Given the particulars, Buddy had me drop it off at his shop for a quick mechanical check-out to file points, clean the carbs, hook up an IV gas can with premix, kick, kick, kick—and she fired up with no excessive smoking and no funny noises. Buddy thought the 8,000 miles showing on the odometer was probably correct and that the motor had probably not been opened up.

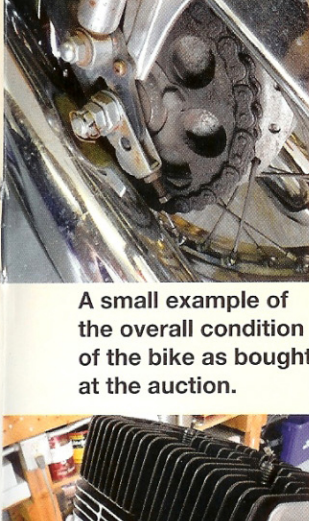
Tear it down

Back home I began taking it apart, photographing as I went, labeling things, and cataloging needed parts. It quickly became evident that there was less than met the eye. The first clue was a seat-base made of wood. The decent-looking exhaust pipes were rotten on the bottom. Wiring was in disarray, etc. The final straw, upon removing the old tires, was that the wheel rims, despite nice, shiny chrome on the outside, were totally rotted on the inside. Useless.

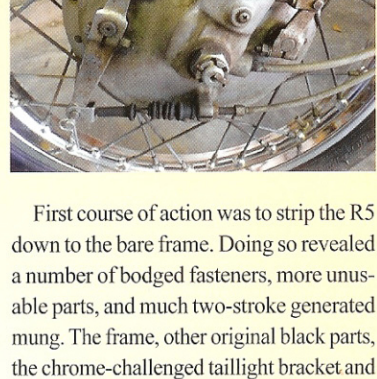
This is the point where a dispassionate analysis recognizes impending disaster and a money pit of enormous, unrecoverable proportion. Me: "So what? Forward."

One thing you need to know about restoring Yamahas is that NOS parts are far more rare and pricey than Honda's. Given the missing parts (signals, mirrors, et al) and state of the rest of the bike, I decided that I would shoot for a show-quality finish but not be bound by originality. (In truth there were some design components that simply hadn't aged very well.)

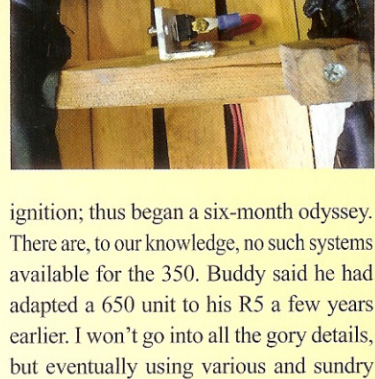
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At the front, rim looks OK at least.



Nice shot of the wooden seat base, "custom" upholstery, and unique wiring.



A small example of the overall condition of the bike as bought at the auction.

First course of action was to strip the R5 down to the bare frame. Doing so revealed a number of bodged fasteners, more unusable parts, and much two-stroke generated mung. The frame, other original black parts, the chrome-challenged taillight bracket and the headlight shell and ears all went out to the powdercoater. Originally the headlight bucket and the tank and side covers were candy tangerine, very 1970s. I knew I was going to change the color, but at this point I didn't have a plan, so black was a safe choice. The Yamaha had chrome pretty much everywhere; it wasn't very good chrome when new and wore even worse. Doing the taillight bracket in black would nicely balance the black headlight bucket.

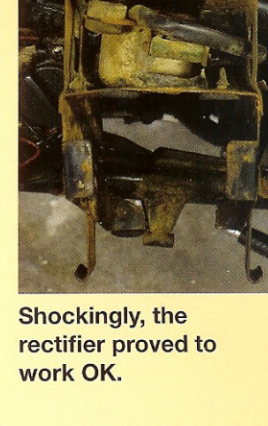
Since the engine ran OK, I just cleaned the heck out of the fins and cases, pulled the head, looked around and sealed it up again. Somewhere along the line the oil pump had been disconnected. Another pump was sourced and rebuilt. I painted and polished the cylinder and head. The case covers were powdercoated in a textured black offset by polished highlights. The motor went back into the frame and, using a Y-adaptor, a large K&N filter replaced the original airbox.

Buddy suggested installing an electronic

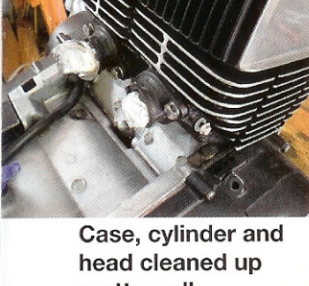
ignition; thus began a six-month odyssey. There are, to our knowledge, no such systems available for the 350. Buddy said he had adapted a 650 unit to his R5 a few years earlier. I won't go into all the gory details, but eventually using various and sundry parts we had built and mounted a system that worked and fit in the case.

To address the wiring issues, I picked up a complete used harness on eBay. This I stripped down to essentials, and mounted on the frame. At the same time, I replaced the old Yuasa battery with a smaller, lighter 5-amp security battery. The headlight was blown (of course), and in the R5 series this is a special sealed unit. Read: expensive. I found one on eBay for about 12-times the cost of a Honda bulb. While I was at it, I also picked up a new chrome rim to replace the dented original.

The wheels were a big issue. There are some quite cheap Chinese chrome rims available and I was tempted. But I was looking for something a little trick, something to set the bike off. I have a couple of old Italian bikes and love the look of their Borrani alloys. I did some research and found that some XS650 Yamahas had 18" alloy rim rear wheels. Since the diameter of their rear brakes looked about the same



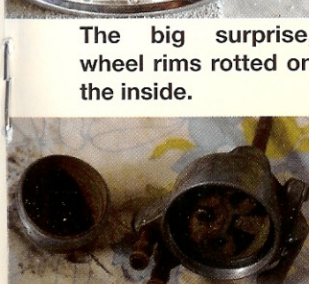
Shockingly, the rectifier proved to work OK.



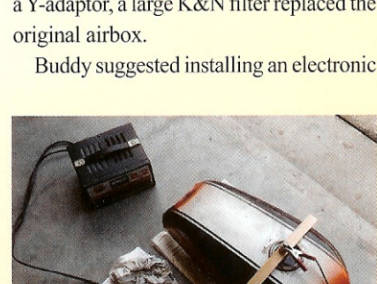
Case, cylinder and head cleaned up pretty well.



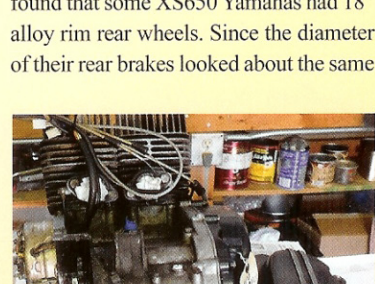
The big surprise, wheel rims rotted on the inside.



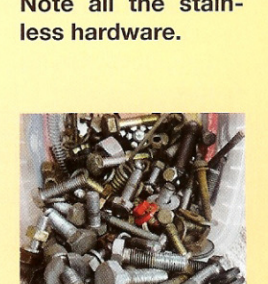
07 - Petcock bowl was rotted through; yes the screw was bent as well as rusty.



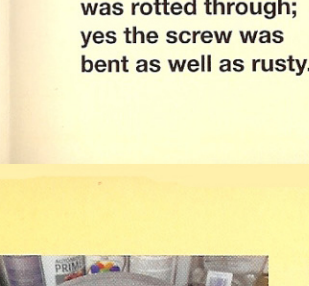
09 - I used the reverse electrolysis method on the rusty gas tank.



The motor as it looked first out of the frame.



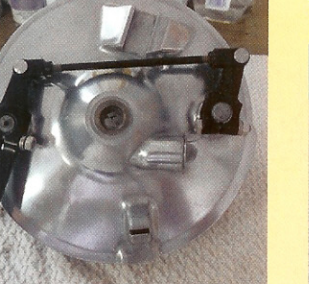
Motor is in, Redwing shocks mounted. Note all the stainless hardware.



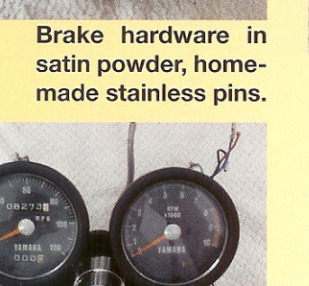
Foot pegs and mount ready to go together.



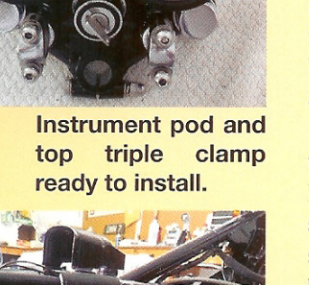
Taillight parts (note previously chrome, now black, bracket and period plate).



Brake hardware in satin powder, home-made stainless pins.



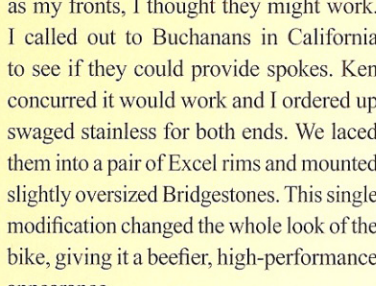
Instrument pod and top triple clamp ready to install.



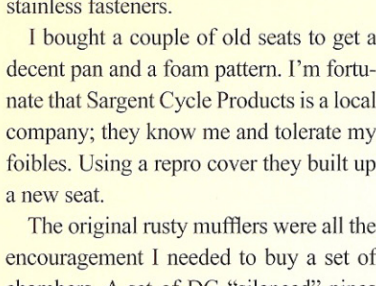
Carburetors, air filter, kick starter, etc. are on, bodywork to follow.



Wiring coming together. Fenders were still chromed at this point.



The piece de resistance, shouldered alloys, stainless spokes, Bridgestones



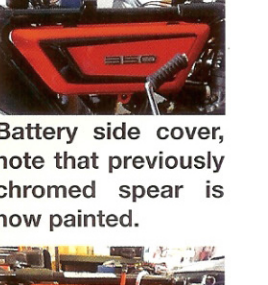
Paint has been curing for about 6 weeks while the bike has been assembled.



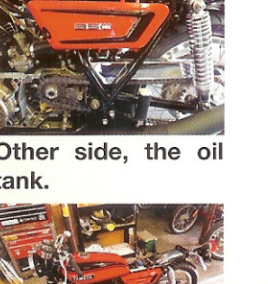
Rebuilt and re-finished forks installed.



Battery side cover, note that previously chromed spear is now painted.



Other side, the oil tank.



That's what we're talking about. Headlight, instruments, tank are on.



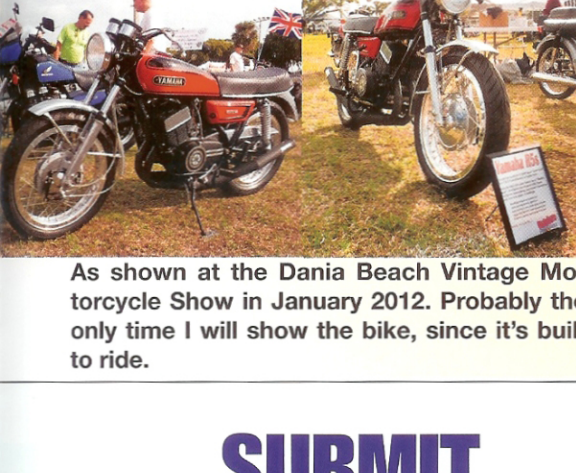
The fenders and chain guard as returned from the powdercoater before polishing.

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Looks much nicer, not so shiny as to detract from the paint job.



On the front the fender now matches the polished aluminum.



As shown at the Dania Beach Vintage Motorcycle Show in January 2012. Probably the only time I will show the bike, since it's built to ride.

ers and chain guard, etc. After having gone through three used rear fenders and a like number of chain guards trying to find decent ones, I just didn't like the way they looked. (Let me digress a moment: Yamaha chrome sucks... there I've said it. It is plated with no underplating; looks and wears poorly.) I have an old Honda Scrambler and the silver painted fenders just look more elegant and timeless. Plus, with the rest of the bike's chrome having been discarded, the fenders looked wrong and detracted from the finish. So the fenders and chain guard came back off and went to the powdercoater for a nice silver baking. I wet sanded them down to polish out the orange peel. Now the bike looked the way I envisioned it.

I was done, finished.

Not so fast. The bike fired right up, but ran like crap. Unless it was screaming, it fouled plugs and died. After several attempted fixes and an equal number of pushes home, I

called my Buddy. We determined it was probably a carburetor issue. I was going away for the summer, so I gave them to him with instructions to do whatever it takes. It turns out someone had pieced together the carbs using mismatched parts from a variety of 250/350 Yamahas. Buddy replaced jets, slides, springs and what all.

Meanwhile, my summer went really well right into August. On my way to Indy for the MotoGP race, I tossed away my BMW GS on a patch of gravel. A life flight to Knoxville's University of Tennessee Trauma Center began a three-month rehabilitation process. The day I was operated on, Buddy brought back the carbs and bolted them in. I was still on the morphine pump when my wife told me that Buddy had the R5 running great. Three months and one week later, I walked out to the garage, took a deep breath and kicked.

Started first try. Best round the block ride of my life. ●

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