



R.I.P. VeeTee

Our story begins in July '89, when I bought my Y-Reg VT500 from a breakers yard in Southampton, for the princely sum of £225. Needless to say, the condition of the bike reflected the price. No MoT, no Tax, blown fork seals and looking as though the indicated 50,000 miles was somewhat inaccurate!

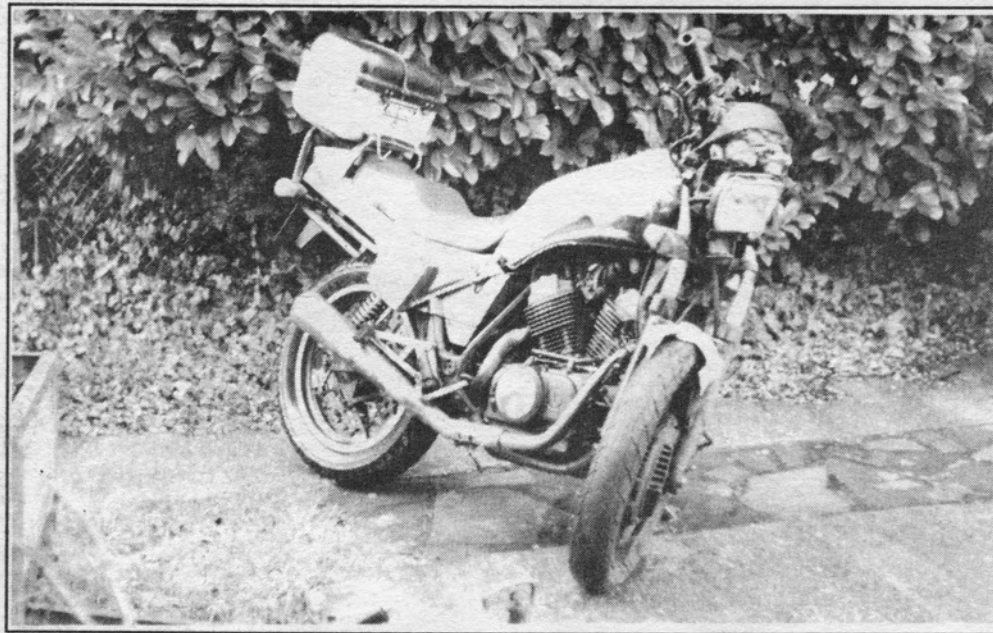
There then followed a weekend of ravaging the New Forest countryside, where a good time was had by all (except the VT). On Monday morning, on my way to work, there was a crunch, a bang, and the back wheel locked. Yes, it had dropped a valve, at about 110mph, leaving a thick black line down the outside lane of the M3. Back to the breakers... After some heated discussions, a B-Reg engine was provided by the breakers in exchange for the old one.

With the B-Reg engine, I did four months of dispatch riding, during which time I covered 40,000 miles and was earning a fair whack, with one of London's finest, Capital Parcels. In the cut and thrust of heavy traffic the bike was impeccable, never faltering when the throttle was cracked open to catch

those split second gaps, and always stopping when wanted, well - in the dry anyway! When the heavens opened, as is often the case in this fair land, it was quite another story. This is due to the light front, which caused lots of trouble. Often when winter came, the tarmac and I became quite intimate.

However, the VT500 was also a surprisingly good motorway 'eater', being capable of cruising at 90 - 100mph with ease, and even reaching 122mph, two up, with full camping gear, on the Autobahns of Southern Germany. Although the bike was much faster than I had expected, it was not as cheap to run as I would have liked. It usually ran at between 30-40mpg. I ran the bike on unleaded petrol, which didn't seem to affect it. But it went through four sets of front disc pads and a rear tyre every 5-6000 miles. To be fair, perhaps I should divulge just what kind of abuse my VT 500 had to survive.

Well, apart from the day to day dispatching, it had a pretty poor time of it when I decided it was play-time. On two occasions I actually lost the bike. The



first time it went missing, I reported it stolen, only to receive a very angry phone call from the landlord of the local pub asking me to, and I quote 'Please come and remove your ----- Honda from my pub!'

Apparently, some friends and I had taken the bike in and bought it a few rounds. I spent several hours that Sunday draining the Newcastle Brown Ale out of the petrol tank...

But you don't have to be drunk or stoned to enjoy riding a VT500. I had a lot of fun on the country lanes of this country and along the mountain passes of Northern Italy, right through to the south of France and back. Although at times it would run hot - in fact, well into the red on the temp gauge - this was due to the fan not working. I cured that by wiring the fan through a fused switch on the handlebars to the battery. The only other bit of electrical work was to fit a new horn on to the handlebars, because the button on the switch gear (which is made up of a spring and two plates) collapsed, twice!

The high ground clearance of the bike, combined with the low profile tyres, made for some very, er... interesting, angles of lean. The bike also did lovely wheelies off hump-back bridges. But after a time, all this high life started to take its toll on my long suffering VT500. It started with little things like the rear tyre shredding at about 80mph one Wednesday afternoon, as I was passing Newport Pagnel Services on

the M1. The headstock bearings were next for replacement (£48 worth!), and then the water pump hose, which was split by something in the central reservation of the A33 just past Chandlers Ford. What was I doing on the central reservation? Well, it's a bit embarrassing. I sort of dozed off - the M3/A33 is very boring at 3am, or at any time come to that! I didn't actually come off, just slowed down a whole lot.

You may be thinking that this guy needs to be taken down a strip or two... No! Well, I was!! By a very solid on-coming Mercedes Benz. The result of the encounter was two broken arms and a broken jaw. But, as usual, the poor old VT came off far worse.

Cause of death: Badly twisted headstock.

On well, now that the VT is gone and buried, I wish I had kept my LC350. Or maybe I'll buy a Z1300 with the compensation money. I wonder if that'll do a wheelie?!

Before I leave you, perhaps I should sum up the merits - or otherwise - of owning a Honda VT500. Great! Until things start to go wrong. Home maintenance is a nightmare and the labour charges when putting it in a shop are quite ridiculous. In all, I think that VT500s need a lot of love and care. If you are thinking of buying, go for anything this side of B-Reg. If you already own an older one... get rid of it.

Zade