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LONG DISTANCE

Warren Dorn's Laverda SFC

Text by Bob Rimel, Photos by Doug Mitchel

"After approximately three years' hobby time, Warren had his SFC ready to do what it was meant to do; ride."

In 1986, Warren Dorn decided he'd like to own one of Laverda's fabled SFCs. At the time, the Illinois resident had owned a detuned version of the maker's 750cc twin, an SF. But aside from having collected a stack of photos on the model (and having seen, but not ridden, an SFC in California), Dorn had no direct experience with Laverda's production, long-distance racer. It would take three more years, and considerable networking, for him to find one.

That find, by the way, was the product of word-of-mouth communication: first to a friend in St. Louis, then to a source in Philadelphia (who put him in touch with a contact in Trenton, New Jersey), and finally to the machine's owner in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dorn made a call, told the owner he'd "like to see the

machine," made a whirlwind trip to North Carolina, struck a deal, then made the round trip all over again (the second time with his trailer).

As found, Warren's machine was in good, but not perfect, condition. It was a low-miler, showing a modest 4,600 miles on its clock, and still wore all of its original equipment; including tires and a very dead battery. Though it had been standing in storage for a long time, as soon as the former owner and Dorn installed a battery borrowed from a BMW and dribbled some gas into the tank, the SFC took fire.

With a little additional attention, Dorn might have ridden the bike essentially as found, but he didn't. In the years he'd been tracking down his example, Warren's respect for Breganze's road rocket had grown. And with reason.



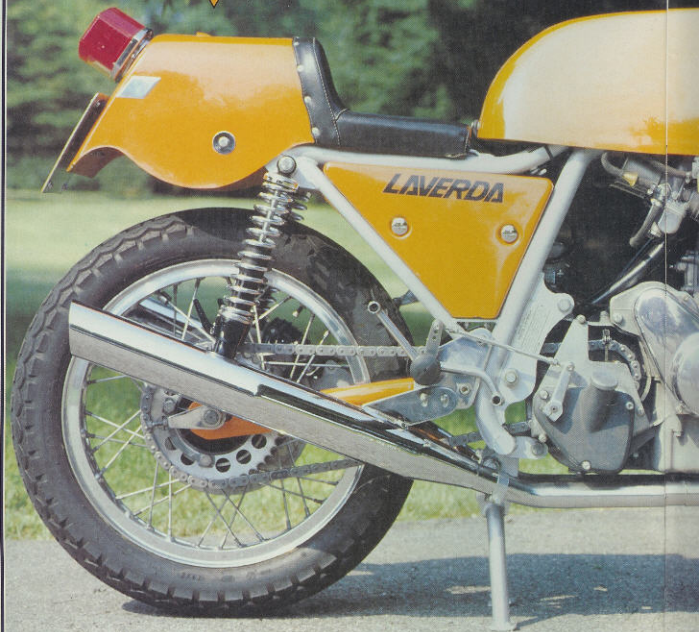
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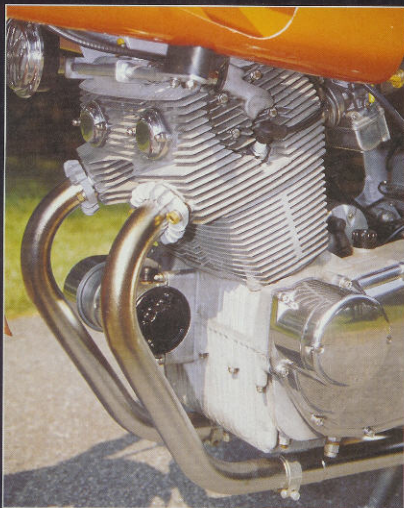
Warren Dorn found this Laverda SFC languishing in a garage in North Carolina. The bike was complete and showed a modest 4,600 miles. With a battery and some gas, it fired up!

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When the owner tore the Laverda twin motor apart, he was surprised to find no wear and just a small amount of old oil in the ball bearings. After a quick lube, the 750 twin purred nicely.

The SFC was a truly remarkable production. Color difference aside, at a glance the SFC may seem much like the later model SF. Similarities, however, are superficial. The SFC is a much more highly refined machine: a hand-assembled motorcycle sporting polished rods, differing valve angles, altered camshaft profiles and ignition curve. Subtle changes, perhaps, in themselves, but changes which collectively make the SFC a different beast entirely. Moreover (and understandably) because the SFC was a machine produced specifically to compete as a production machine, it's a rare bird. (Dorn tells us 349 such machines were built in total, 222 of

which were produced in 1974, the year our feature twin was built. Of the 222 '74 models, approximately 50 machines were shipped to the U.S., perhaps 12 to 20 of that number still remaining stateside).

So, as good as the bike was to begin with, Warren decided a teardown was in order—just to check things out and maintain the bike as it was originally. His intention was not to restore, and he hasn't.

The teardown revealed some brake work was in order. Warren turned the work of bead blasting and turning the discs to MCC Motorcycles of Villa Park, Illinois. That firm, noted for its good wrenching on Ducatis and Triumphs, also drilled for the machine's safety

wiring, provided "parts and very good advice." Though Dorn found himself with no major parts to track down, he did acquire some needed bits and pieces from Slater Brothers, in Washington state, and from Miura Engineering, of Great Britain. Presently, he's also having some small rubber parts cast by a former factory worker in Breganze, the result of a lead he got through other SFC owners.

While he had the machine disassembled, Warren also decided some metal polishing and rechroming was called for to bring the twin up to its original state of finish. That work he farmed out to Courtesy Polishing of Villa Park in suburban Chicago. Since the frame finish showed some signs of beginning failure (the silver paint has a high zinc content), Dorn also repainted it though he considers his work there to fall more in the line of preservation than restoration. The same attitude he holds toward the very minor touchup of a fender he had to perform. (A dime-sized repaint doesn't make for a "new paint job").

To the highly trained eye, minor departures from stock U.S. trim are discernible: the blocked turn signal stem and the stainless nuts and bolts substituted for the originals, Warren reminds us.

When he tore down the engine, Dorn found that the only work required internally was to clean the old lubricant from the ball bearings and re-lube them. No wear showed at all, and the reassembled engine purrs like an untroubled tiger for hour after hour. The carbs (twin Dell'Ortos), however, did require some minor "re-engineering," work called for, very likely, by the twin's long dormancy. Fitting one (out of four) new rear wheel bearings and installation of a new chain completed the mechanical work called for.

Electrics on some European and British motorcycles are sometimes of such doubtful reliability as to have given rise to an extensive folklore charged with negativity. Not so the electrics on the SFC (though some Laverdas were plagued with unproven systems). Dorn's machine carries the stock Bosch components: dual points, coils, voltage regulator, generator and starter motor, the only exceptions to Bosch equipment being the CEV tail light and Nippondenso (ND) switch gear. The tach (conservatively red-lined at 7500RPM, Warren tells us) and the speedo are, like the switch gear,



Nicely appointed, the Laverda SFC came with Borrani WM3 rims, TT100 Dunlop tires, Tomaselli levers, etc. The twin Dell'Orto carbs needed to be cleaned after a long dormant period.

Nippondenso units. Clutch and brake are activated by Tomaselli levers.

The wire wheels (WM3's) use Borrani rims, the bike being shod with brand new, but period-correct, 4.10 x H 18 TT100 Dunlops; one of two choices Laverda gave the buyer, the other being Pirellis.

After approximately three years' hobby time, Warren had his SFC ready to do what it was meant to do, ride. In that department, the SFC's owner is highly satisfied.

"It's a very tough motorcycle,"



With under 5,000 miles on the clock, a bike shouldn't need serious attention—we all know that's hardly ever the case. This one was an exception.

Warren told us. "It's heavy; almost everything about it clearly reflects the seriousness of Laverda to build a machine capable of withstanding the rigors of long-distance roadracing. The rear axle, for example, is very heavy and strong, and carries four sets of SFK roller bearings. But the machine doesn't 'feel' heavy on the road. It feels stable. That's different. And the steering is precise."

The machine's stability, Dorn tells us, is the result of a number of factors working in concert: its Marzocchi forks work in harmony with the ultra-strong frame, in which the engine acts as stressed member, the bare frame alone resembling a giant "C."

Shifting the machine's unit five-speed is made more pleasurable by the smooth action of the clutch (enhanced by the needle bearings nestled in the clutch basket). Acceleration to 45 mph or so is even and brisk, though the 36mm Dell'Ortos really come on between 45 and 75, the SFC being endowed with a "quick high end." And when it's time to halt the marvelous, bright machine, the Brembo triple discs work as advertised. Power is "always there," as Warren

describes his machine's performance, produced by a nominal 750cc (actual 743.9) twin equipped with both OHV and OHC, the latter adjusted through nut and set screw. Bore is 75mm, stroke 74mm, producing the "oversquare" ratio so favored on the Continent.

Readers wishing to see Dorn's machine up close and personal won't find it at antique or classic shows. No, this SFC's a rider in the hands of an enthusiast who knows what he has and knows what it's meant to do: cover the road. ■



The rear brake is actuated by a "dual-action" heel-toe lever. Makes slowing down double the fun, especially at high speeds!