Rebirth of a veteran

Bob Forster

A T FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE, Bob Forster knew every spoke and bearing of his father's three speed tourer; but his mind was becoming fixed on a better breed of bike, a bike without limitations).

Ambition is one thing; paying for it is something else altogether.

My bike had done everything asked of it so it seemed churlish and ungrateful to be casting around for something better. But I couldn't help noticing the gleaming chromium on my friends' bikes, the ten gears or the whitewall tyres.

A new bike, however, was out of the question. Pocket money and a morning paper round would never elevate me to cycling heaven; they barely kept me in aniseed balls. glorious. Surely, somewhere, there was a disused bike just looking for a new owner who was keen to do it up so that it could hold its handlebars up with pride. I searched the white cards in the shop windows and spread the word I was in the market to upgrade my 'wheels'.

Which was how I came to be in Paul's shed. He had heard my requirements at school. Yes, he had a bike which he didn't use. Yes, it needed some attention. And no, it wouldn't cost the earth. So here we were and here I was, tingling with a five year old's excitement.

first sight. the of Elswick-Hopper, it bespoke Now for the modifications. antiquity.

The wheel rims were rusty, the tape on the handlebars looked like the intestines of a stressed-out rhino and the whole was thick with dust and grime; Noah must have had hours of fun on it.

inspection, however, revealed its potential. Although both tyres were flat and the saddle was ideally fit for a rheumatic vicar, it had brakes which worked and eight gears - four Benelux rings and a double changer. With care and attention, the contents of a large ragbag and some economical modifications, this bike had potential. the potential of a thoroughbred. And when the price of two pounds ten was agreed, my day was made. The future was black but the future

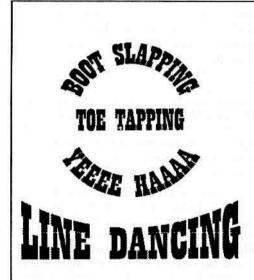
I rode it home. I'll repeat that: I rode it home. For just two pounds and ten shillings I had a bike which was immediately roadworthy. Looks didn't matter - it worked; the same could be said of its owner. With such a large frame it was vaguely lethal for my size, but the tyres had inflated first time, the gears changed and the brakes really did work. Eight gears! there was no looking back now.

The first stage of restoration was purely cosmetic : was it really black or did it just seem that way? Several filthy rags later and the tincture was confirmed. All the nuts were checked word and I sprayed oil around as if 3-in-1 'unprepossessing' would have been came in Moët et Chandon bottles. suitable, if I had known how to use There was little likelihood of the the word, let alone spell it. It was chromium ever gleaming again but black with a frame far bigger than its the smooth whirr of a well-lubricated 26 inch wheels suited. Made by chain, plus gears that changed with a Hopper, presumably the forerunner whisper, more than made up for this.

Handlebars and saddle came first. A new set of drop handlebars was wrapped around meticulously with black tape before I turned my attention to comfort in place of geriatricism. This came in the shape of a Coureur plastic saddle, rather than the more favoured leather models, a saddle just wide enough to ensure that the touring cyclist could still walk at the end of the day and

sprung enough for a rider who has the padding of a stick insect. Next there was a pair of red mudguards and a new pump which just left sufficient for a red bell before the pocket money expired.

Black and red and purring; my veteran was indeed the cat's whiskers.



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