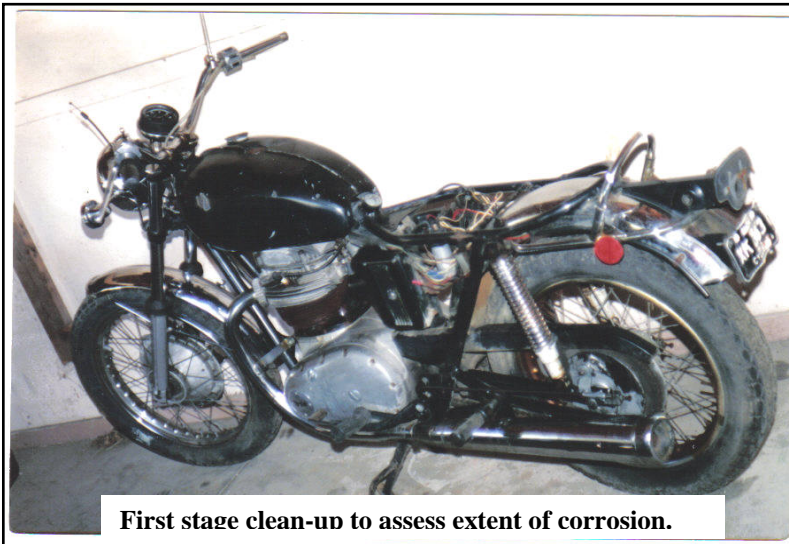


13. “Old Junky-bike

It all began in the spring of 1989, as I turned my car into the narrow entrance of a parking lot at the local Secretary of State building to renew the road tax tabs on my 1979 Honda CBX. Before I could complete the turn I was met by a large Chevy pickup leaving the parking lot at exactly the same time, I was unable to fully enter until he had exited and visa versa. As I waited for him to clear my path I was almost alongside of the pickup bed and straining my head upwards could just see the upper portion of the rusty remains of a big twin British motorcycle strapped down to the truck bed with tie-downs. Because of the pickup box side walls, only the cylinder head and with no gas tank fitted, the upper portions of the frame were visible. For a couple of minutes we were stuck like this, during which time I was able to determine that the engine belonged to a BSA A65 and the massive spine of the frame told me that it was an Oil-In-Frame 70's version. Rolling down my window I called back to the driver, asking him what model the bike was. “650 BSA about 1971” came back his reply, “Do you want to take a better look at it?”

To the relief of a line of waiting car drivers he backed up the pickup and we parked side by side. I looked over the machine for several minutes, noting the absence of the gas tank, seat, air-cleaner box and many cycle parts. It had been standing outside in his yard for many years, I was told, “I've got it tied down on the back of the truck to prevent my wife from getting it hauled away while I'm out at work, haven't yet figured out just what I'm going to do with it!” The bike was indeed a bit of a mess, although at least the engine was complete and surprisingly, could still be turned over with the kick-start. Everything once chromed had turned brown with rust. \$100 and twenty minutes later, we lifted it off the back of the pickup and set it down in my driveway. My poor wife had a fit when she saw it standing out there, but it was too late now as the Chevy pickup sped off down the street.

The bike had many parts missing as well as numerous incorrect ones fitted. The flat tires were dry-rotted out yet when pumped up to wheel it into the garage, still managed to hold air. Wheeling it in with both the front and rear brakes dragging on rusted drums was not easy. A battered old Triumph gas tank was also part of the purchase as well as a Kawasaki seat, neither of which had been fitted.



There was a still active wasp's nest in the gas tank and mice had once nested in the remains of the left hand side air cleaner box. The gearbox was a wreck, almost full of water and everything but the gears themselves and the shafts miraculously, was rusted out. It took me more than six months to get it all apart without breaking parts or damaging the engine installation.

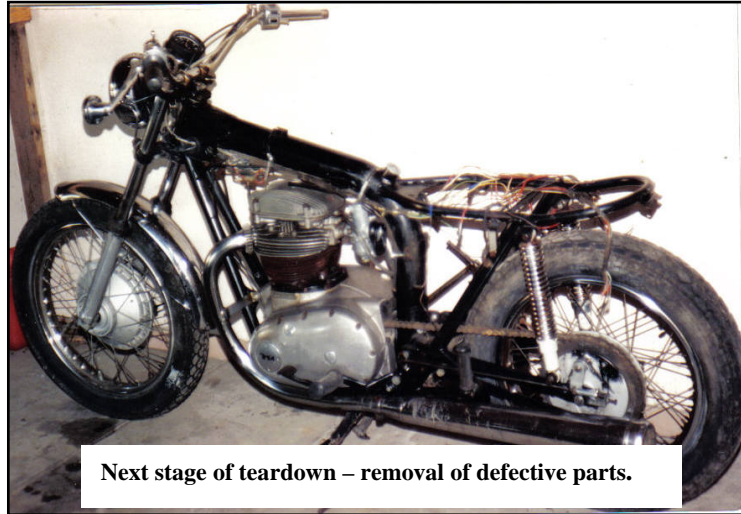
I never did like the last 650's that BSA made before going bankrupt in 1973, especially the Thunderbolt. The frame was originally painted in an awful mushroom color masquerading as 'dove gray' and the horrible original plain petrol tank looked

like an old bread bin. The silencer, it had only one side fitted, was an original reverse megaphone style. To my ear, they sounded over-muffled and awful. Unlike its Triumph TR6 single carburetor competitor that goes almost as good as the twin carb Bonnies, the Thunderbolt was by comparison pretty slow off the mark compared to the Spitfires and Lightnings. The color system of the rest of the bike was an ugly two-tone moss green and off-white which, matched with the color frame assembly, looked like a veritable 'tyrd'.

Since it was this model year that put the kiss of death on BSA, it did not have much collector value so I did not invest in powder coating and copious re-chroming. I merely refurbished it as a sort of budget bike. I fitted common parts from prior model years of the BSA A65 650cc range of Lightnings to replace missing or ugly ones. The silencers are now from the 1968 Lightning, as are the decals on the side panels, the gas tank is 1971 Triumph Bonneville, which shared the same Oil-In-Frame concept, the handlebars and rear view mirrors are in fact first year of production Honda CBR 750 parts. Rev counters were not fitted to the Thunderbolt so I fitted a Lightning one. I also fitted Boyer electronic ignition and a high output alternator to replace the original Lucas stuff which is now stashed in boxes. All chromed parts are original BSA parts, over the years I progressively restored them and had them re-chromed.

I up-rated the tires to today's technology and nearly high-sided the bike on its first trip out. I put Dunlop K91's soft 'stickies' on since I don't ride long distances or that many miles a year any more. The trouble is, there's not enough ground clearance for the stands or the silencers to capitalize on the improved tire adhesion so it was a bad move. Plus, it really screwed up the geometry of the centre stand since the modern tires have a considerably smaller diameter than the old Avon's had and it's a miracle I never wrecked my back lifting it the extra inch and a half vertical increase in lift. I only corrected that last year by fitting a modified spare centre stand, an inch and a half shorter.

Now it's a piece of cake, I should have done it years ago. The bike does handle very well though and I have finally jettied it to run much better, it doesn't vibrate like the Lightnings did. That 32 inch extra high seat height doesn't bother me even though now and I've shrunk to 5ft 8ins, but it does make it feel a bit like one is sitting upon the bike as opposed to sitting into it. I think the smaller outside diameter tires have helped compensate for this.



Next stage of teardown – removal of defective parts.



Photo above taken in 1991 after first completion

It made its first appearance at the 1991 MTR Battle of the Brits show, got lots of interest but did not place.

Original Western Style handlebars were fitted and a '71 BSA Gas Tank was found. However, I preferred the '71 Triumph tank and restored and fitted that instead.

Every ball-race, bushing, seal, rubber component, and control cable was replaced with new parts.

Lucas wiring and electrical components apart from the Headlamp and Alternator were also completely replaced. (I believe this 'killed' the bike originally since only 8,000 miles were in evidence on the still working speedometer)

Although the mufflers are new '68 Lightning absorption type, the outlet pipes and crossover pipe assy. are still original.

Bottom end of engine was still in excellent order but Top end gearbox and transmission system were all stripped, refurbished and rebuilt.

Hunting down the new or replacement parts was once again one of the most fun parts of undertaking this project, the Classic Motorcycle world here in the US. is every bit as rich in larger than life and interesting characters as I had grown accustomed to back in England. Friendships were made that still hold good to this day, some sixteen years later. One of the most memorable people I met was Bob Michalek or, BSA Bob of Iota

Products as he is best known to the motorcycle community at large. Fortunately I was lucky enough to meet him very early on in my project, he saved me a fortune with his huge inventory of used and new BSA parts and his knowledge of these machines is legendary.

At that time his place of business was on a road called Selsdon, a small street off Woodward Ave adjacent to the Detroit Opera Hall building. In 1989 his was the only house left standing, all others had been demolished and he had a large two story warehouse close by where he stored a potpourri of all kinds of British made motorcycles in all sorts of un-restored condition on the second storey for security. It was a very bad neighborhood. The house itself was very old and had a barn out back and high chain link fencing with barbed wire almost surrounded the two buildings leaving only the front of the house accessible. Alsatian dogs roamed the land behind the fence. A good book could be written about BSA Bob but I'll stop right here. It would be

unjust not mention him and the important role he played in helping me back in those early days of this project.



Doesn't look much like a 71' Thunderbolt, but who wants it to?

Only my grandson Joey (who was only three years old in 1991 so knew no better), had faith in "reviving old Phoenix from the ashes" to roar once again. Even he used to refer to it as, "The Old Junky Bike" but 'mis-spent' hours with me out in the garage getting filthy dirty and covered in grease, much to the disgust of his mum and dad. He was quite adept at riding atop the gas tank of my Honda CBX around the quiet backstreets of where

we lived and longed for his legs to grow long enough to reach the foot-pegs so he could ride pillion with me. That day finally came around when he was about ten years old and we rode out together almost every weekend. Now he's eighteen and the proud owner of his very own 1966 Triumph Tiger 100.

When finally the big day to fire 'Old Junky Bike' up for the first came, Joey rounded up a few of his little buddies to witness the occasion. Predictably, the first firing was a mixture of misfires and back-fires as oil to preserve the cylinders fouled a plug and the sound sent all Joey's buddies scrambling from the garage with their hands clutched to their ears. He was the only one to hang by me as I carried out the finer aspects of tuning in the carburetor once she had 'cleared her throat' and warmed up. As the engine finally leveled out, settling down to a throaty idle, I'm not certain whose eyes were gleaming the most, Joey's or my own.

Now I'd like to say that, "We all rode off into the sunset and lived happily ever-after", but that would be a major travesty of the truth. Only in movies or on Reality TV Shows does this ever happen. Getting the bike to fire up at all after such a project is only the first step. Keeping it



running is the second and getting it to run properly is the third and most time consuming. After the best running state is reached only then do we discover little things like time welded or blocked airways in the carburetor, necessitating finding and fitting a new parts. Sometimes, this can even be compounded by an inability to smooth out major engine vibration because of an accumulation of mechanical wear in the original ignition system parts. I've heard people say, "That would never happen to me, I'm too meticulous" but I suspect they may have simply replaced every original component with brand new and merely become a 'Fitter' as opposed to a 'Mechanic'. In today's world this delusion is very easy to fall for. Of course, it is possible to become simply darned lucky, and if that happens to you, instantly go buy a lottery ticket while your good luck run lasts.

The biggest contribution to achieving smooth running for me came with fitting a modern Boyer electronic ignition system. Installing it myself with no prior experience did not come without problems. I



It's amazing how a fresh paint job can breathe new life into an 'old girl'.

needed lots of help in addressing and overcoming the problems of Frequency Modulus (FM) where running the new ignition wiring too close to the existing charging system wiring causes the electronic ignition module to pick up false signals or pulses. This is from the close presence of an alternating current where pulses trick the module to release a spark when the piston is not in its correct setting to Top Dead Center (T.D.C.)

Although I sold this BSA to a close friend in 1995, under a 'gentlemen's agreement' I bought her back from his estate after he passed away in 2000. All told, the Thunderbolt has been around the two of us for over sixteen years now. His name was Ron Rimbey and he was quite a character who, in his misbegotten youth had once been a BSA works rider and had raced against the likes of Dick Mann. He once

told me that he had no idea what Dick's face looked like since all he ever saw of him was his backside.

My next step will be to replace the tired looking but true running original chrome wheel rims with a pair of new ones that I now have to hand, laced of course with stainless steel spokes. After that, a day will come at last when I get to give her that brand new pair of new exhaust outlets to replace the blued but still totally functional original ones. As a grand old soul once told me many years ago, "Son, there are some things in life that you just can't rush into!" So, although sixteen years have elapsed since I first clapped eyes on this now charming old bike, apart from the eighteen months it took to complete the first stage of stripping and rebuilding, she has been on the road every single year since with most additional work being carried out during the winter months.

She fires up usually with the first kick and rarely so much as misses a beat. But the biggest thing of all is that since I got rid of the vibration, components no longer seem to be falling off these days. The phrase, "All the parts falling off this motorcycle are of the finest British craftsmanship" can no longer be used and 'Lucas, the Prince of Darkness' (a.k.a. Lucas, Inventor of Darkness) has had his infamous reputation severely tarnished as batteries, once good for about a little over a year, now seem to hold together for at least twice that time.

"Old Junky Bike" Rides Again - - To a Second Place at the MTR 2006 Battle of the Brits Show, Freedom Hill.

"Well shiver me' timbers and rattle me' rowlocks!" One week after the Detroit Metro Triumph Riders hosted the 2006 Battle of the Brits show at Freedom Hill, I awoke to discover that, 'Old Junky Bike', my old 71' BSA Thunderbolt, had scraped enough votes from unsuspecting visitors to take a second place in class. Me' old mate' Tim Hatton deservedly took the number one spot with his honest to goodness, bread and butter daily ride, a 63' A10 engined BSA Super Rocket.

Rebuilt and refurbished fifteen years ago, the old "Beezer" has been at the annual show every year since 1992 and this is the first time it took a place in any judging. Sadly, I had to leave the B.O.B. show early and so was denied the opportunity of self-indulgently basking in a brief moment of surprised glory and remained blissfully unaware until early one Monday morning, a week later.

I spent my entire day at the show chatting to all the good folks I haven't seen in ages and completing my own ballot sheet. Considering the media weather forecaster's gloomy predictions the day before, the attendance was really good and the quality of bikes shown seems to get better year by year.

Thank goodness I did not have to be judging the "Masters Class", what a line up once again, unbelievable!!! The owners/restorers of every machine exhibited can take a bow for this one again. Congratulations to all the eventual winners and especially our good friend Vic Schultz, a true Master Builder and Restorer. It was looking at these beautiful machines that makes me truly realize how lucky 'Old Junky Bike' was to have even placed in a class position. So there's an incentive for compulsive trophy hunters, if this 'old girl' can do it, anything is possible.

A footnote to young Joe Taminski, we took out the baffles of his Tiger 100 just for the show and Joe and his girlfriend Helena were heard roaring around the perimeter road wearing grins on their faces reminiscent of a 1953 Buick Skylark with a brand new chrome grill. Joe has fully maintained and serviced this lovely bike since it was built by his uncle, Vic Venti, in 2002. At the age of fourteen, he became the youngest member of the



Look at those grins! - Joe Taminski & Helena Murphy



'Aged' owner aboard 'Old Junky Bike' and grandson Joe Taminski on his 2003 B.O.B class winning 65' Tiger 100.

Photo by kind courtesy of John Wyatt

MTR. He started riding dirt bikes at the age of nine years old. He's been riding pillion with me since he was eight, when his legs were at last long enough to reach the foot pegs on my 79' Honda CBX. (At 4 years old he rode atop the gas tank for short but frequent trips around the quiet subdivision.) 'Old Junky Bike' is the name 'Joey' gave my BSA Thunderbolt after he saw it in its un-restored state back in 1992 when he was only four years old. He graduated from High School with honors this year and fulfilled all his promises to his grandparents and his parents this past three years. Joe has just become the legal owner of this lovely bike, having now attained the ripe old age of eighteen. He has been wrenching on it for three years. Way to Go Joe!!

(Word count: 2836 words)