

The Sammy Miller High Boy Bultaco

Last July I found an ebay auction for an odd trials bike. It was a Bultaco M151 motor in a British-made Sammy Miller frame. The bike was somewhat weathered and tired, but on the plus side was only 100 miles or so away. The Model 151 is a bit of a rare bird, it's a Sherpa T 350 (actually 325cc) that had a short, six month production run. There were no bids, on a lark and lacking a current project, I put in the minimum bid at the last moment. When picked up it was about as expected, but it ran, I paid and took it home.

I did a bit of research. Sammy Miller built a number of frames for Bultaco motors in the 70's. I wrote to him at his museum but he was of limited help saying the records had been lost in a fire many years ago. He did send me a copy of an old advertisement for the frames. The current operators of Sammy Miller Parts likewise had no information. I posted on several web sites and here at SMOG seeking any information with very little result. I found there were a couple (2) 250cc examples out west but that was all. Slowly I pieced together some info. The frames were referred to as "High Boys" thanks to their use of a skid plate as the frame lower section. There were probably three different series with slight variations. I believe mine to be the second series, based on the serial number stamped on the steering head. I received a few early documents with the bike and found the donor Bultaco was purchased in March 1975 in the UK. More on this later. Sometime in the late 70's Miller took a prototype to Japan and made a deal with Honda to supply frames for the new TL125. This marked the end for Bultaco frames and turned out to be a wise decision as he built many more Honda frames, and the follow on company continues to do so to this day.

As an aside, the frames were welded up in a little town in the south of England, New Milton. That was also where the Rickman brothers were building their frames and bikes. My guess is that town probably had the highest concentration of top notch welders in the country.

While working the web for info, I began on the bike by generally cleaning it, shooting lots of photos, and making lists of needs. I stripped it to the bare frame and, along with general reconditioning, began the laborious task of polishing. Miller chrome plated his frames, not triple chrome, more of an industrial finish. Using Ospho, bronze wool, metal polish, and lots of elbow grease, a really nice frame emerged. The motor, being relatively fresh, required only cosmetics; more polish, paint, etc. The forks were rebuilt and also polished.

The wheels turned out to be a big problem. I found a few broken spokes but initially, I thought I could simply replace them without disassembling the wheels. I carefully refinished the hubs and polished the rims with the wheels intact only to find that they would need to come apart and have all the spokes replaced. Turns out there were many incorrect spokes and some of the spoke holes had been elongated so the wheels needed rebuilding. Had I realized this earlier I would have broken them down before busting knuckles on the hubs. In the end though they came out really nice.

The fenders were a disaster. The front was homemade, the rear cracked, split and broken. I was able to source an original set of Sammy Miller fender brackets out of the UK and fitted a pair of replica M199 fenders. The seat/tank unit has its own interesting story. For a brief period in 1975 Britain banned fiberglass fuel tanks on motorcycles. The Bultaco importer commissioned a local company, Homerlite, to provide hand hammered alloy tanks. These tanks were very light, fragile and easily damaged. Mine required some serious surgery, beyond my abilities. A friend with a local body shop who had previously painted my BMW café racer took on the task and did a great job. He finished it in my favorite shade of British Racing Green, a 70's Porsche color. Sargent Cycle Products recovered the seat using a Kit Campeon pattern after I repaired the seat pan. All this was perhaps taking some liberty, but there was really no "original" to restore to, it being a competition bike that has passed through several iterations.

One quirk was that the hardware was a mixture of Wentworth and Metric. Where possible I converted to Metric, sometimes tapping out to the nearest Metric size. In truth the bike went together pretty easily. The entire project took about five months. As usual, the final cost was about double my rosy initial estimate, but I'm quite pleased with the final result.

Earlier I mentioned receiving a few copied documents, one of which was the purchase receipt. There was also the original British registration document with the name of the owner and an email trail from 2005 between the original and second owners. I wrote to both men and sent photos of the completed motorcycle, beginning an extended correspondence.

Here's the story: Colin Blake was a teenage trials talent. After competing on a Triumph Cub and a used Sherpa, his dad bought the M151 and subsequently assembled the High Boy. Colin competed on it for a couple of years, including at the well-known Isle of Man Two Day. Colin kept the bike after marriage, took it to France and later when he emigrated to New Hampshire. His son rode it a bit, but mostly it lay about. In 2005, with an impending move to the Pacific Northwest he sold it locally to Brad Marshall. Brad says he rode it only once, it ran out of gas and he parked it. Brad moved to Florida and passed it on there to Don Jacobs from whom I bought it a couple of years later.

And that completes the circle.

Now, does anyone out there have more to add to the story of these frames and kits? If so, please contact me at the address below.

Alan Singer

adsinger@aol.com

www.MotoEuro.org