Why the Linsdell Enfields work

It could be said without exaggeration that in this past season of vintage racing Steve Linsdell has done more for Royal Enfield's reputation than the factory ever achieved with its own competition efforts. Steve wheeled out a new 700 twin to complement the 350 single he had campaigned the previous season, and proceeded to decimate the opposition in almost every major event. *Royce Creasey* looks into the workings of a small but beautifully effective team.

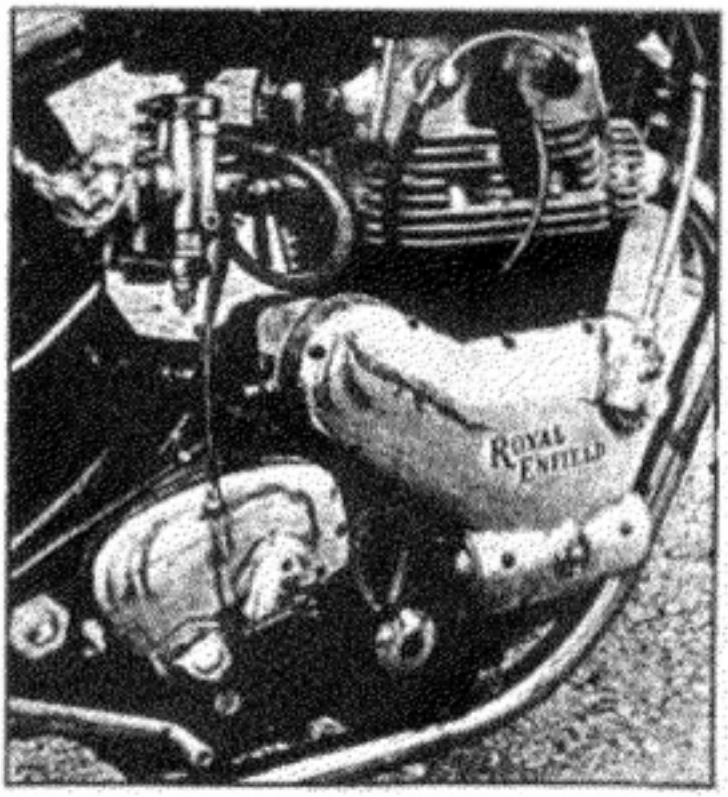
SUCCESS in motor racing, the ancient sages say, comes down to three factors, all of which must be right if the chequered flag is going to be a regular sight. Of equal importance they are the Machine, the Rider and the Team. Standing in the Donington paddock looking at Steve Linsdell's 1953 700cc Meteor twin, parked next to his 1950 350cc Bullet single, it was clear that he has managed to achieve this delicate balance. There can be no doubt that Steve, the rider, is very good. I managed to get clear of the bar enough times to actually watch the appropriate races. No 105, the ensemble's regular number, apart from being in front by a large margin, was always on the same line and always going through the braking and accelerating operations in the same places. Listening to the power being turned into it was convincing — no hesitant bursts, just a clean commencement of sound as he rode through the corner.

Then there's the team. In this case it's a pretty small unit, just Steve and his tech man Simon Lowe, who apparently was responsible for the initial encouragement for the venture into vintage racing. Enfield owners everywhere say 'Thank you, Simon'. The best way to judge the effectiveness of a team is to look not only at the bikes but at its peripherals, the bits and pieces judged necessary to keep the machines together. This team makes it in every way. I came across the van while it was deserted and closed up. The two bikes were parked behind it, both on identical stands, both clean and ready. That was all, no oil puddles, no junk, bits of broken machinery or swearing mechanics. Even the van looked cared for.

Closer inspection of the bikes revealed the sort of detailed preparation that wins races. Everything involved with this effort is simple, minimal and secure. Wherever the two machines can use the same bits this has been done. Thus seats, suspensions, wheels, tyres, tanks, and bars are all identical. The few bits that have to be added to go racing, mainly engine breathing arrangements, are likewise identical on the 350 and the 700, and are also neat and compact. I'm not especially up on Royal Enfield, except perhaps for the later 350 single, but I've been around for long enough to have some idea of the bits that break, leak and fall off. Looking round these two bikes it was clear that Simon knows all the potential failings too. At all the key points on the bikes is a short and neat piece of locking wire, or a minimal modification.

It's tempting to say that the ability that can produce this sort of preparation on a winning bike is wasted on post-vintage racing, but I guess it's being done for love here; doing it for money in something like Formula 1 car racing probably isn't anything like as much fun. Some indication of the level of reliability achieved can be got from the reply to journalist's standard question No 23: 'What sort of problems have you had with it so far?' A pause for reflection produced the memory of the magneto coming loose at Brands. Not, you understand, falling off or breaking, just coming a bit loose. You can bet that won't happen again, ever.

OK, you don't believe any of this, you regard it as common knowledge and quite obvious that really Steve is just an average rider and Simon just an average tech, so the secret of this runaway success must be in the bikes, and would I kindly get on with telling everyone what goes into them. The 350's performance may have been less of a surprise than the way the 700 emerged as an instant winner; it certainly was to me because although I've always rated the 350, the big Enfields



Above: Perspex window replacing oil filler neck hints that extensive lubrication mods have been effected. Engine oil is now added via chaincase breather.