

LAST OF LINE

Words: Hightower • Pix: King Rat

OUR (THAT'S ME, SHAUN, AND MY GOOD LADY, JACKIE) QUEST FOR A TRIKE STARTED MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS AGO. IN THOSE DAYS WE LIVED ON A NARROW BOAT AND SPENT OUR TIME SEEKING OUR FORTUNE TRAVELLING THE INLAND WATERWAYS.

We would often stop at Leighton Buzzard in Bedfordshire to use the laundrette there and, to while away the time while the washing went round and round, I would venture up the hill following the sound of metal being beaten to death and a most colourful use of the English language. I found where these sounds were coming from and took a peek, what a sight! Folk were doing all sorts of metal bashing, but what the hell were they making? There were a few chopper motorcycles parked here and there, but what really blew me away were the trikes. This was my first time up close and personal with a trike – I'd seen a picture of a Big Daddy Roth one in Car & Car Conversions magazine (remember that?) – but this was the real deal and they were here in the UK. 'One day' we thought, 'we'll have one of them trike thingies' and one was added to the wish list. Sadly, reality beckoned and it was time to hit the dryers back down the hill of dreams.

Over the next twenty years our family grew up and moved out and our finances started to get slightly better. One day the 'phone goes - it's me brother and he's having a V-Max trike built. Damn, he was going to get his trike first. Money was tight, but we found a complete basket case of Reliant hardtail trike and, after a good few weeks in the shed with the spanners, we were on the road. We went all over, rallies in the north and south, even a trip to Belgium to the European Trike Fest. Now my brother and I are both over six foot six tall so our trikes have to work. We went to Stormin' and the V-Max was all over our old Reliant ... hmm, we needed something bigger to try and keep up. 🍷





MOTOR:

Rover 3.9 V8, completely rebuilt with new parts/bearings/seals, road/race cam, re-worked heads, big bore pistons & barrels, Edelbrock four barrel carb & manifold, three speed automatic gearbox, Mallory racing ignition, one-off stainless steel exhausts by Gazelle (0121 2883624 or www.gazbike.demon.co.uk), stainless water & oil lines, powdercoated rockers & sump, rear-mounted radiator, twin electric cooling fans

CHASSIS:

One-off V8 Rover chassis by Desperate Dan's

AXLE SET-UP:

Jaguar IRS by Desperate Dan's, narrowed eight inches, Jaguar inboard brakes, aftermarket chrome seventeen inch wide wheels, seventeen inch tyres, Fiat servo, braided stainless steel brake lines

FRONT END:

Modified Rover wheel & brake, one-off leading link forks/ inch & half thick alloy slab yokes/ tiller 'bars by Desperate Dan's, braided stainless steel brake lines,

Over this twenty year period I had followed the progress of Desperate Dan's – the shop we'd seen in Leighton Buzzard - via the press and the bush telegraph. Chris Ireland and his team had a great reputation for building chops, but he was getting even more well known for building trikes. There were articles in magazines and even a trike built for TV (Dr. Who), and the whole operation had been moved (back, as it turns out) to Great Yarmouth. I still could not afford to even get a frame made though. Then in the bike press I read that Chris'd gone nuts, the receivers were in and Desperate Dan's was no more. Was this the end of a thirty year dream? I could not believe that I was never going to get a Desperate Dan's trike.

To help try and raise the profile of trikes, Jackie and I had got involved with the Brothers of

the Third Wheel (BTW) trike association. It's a family-based trike group, out to have fun on trikes. Some are home-built by members, while others are imported into the UK from Europe. So we put the word out to see if there were any big V8 trikes up for sale, hoping a Desperate Dan's V8 might come up for the right price. Nothing did, though, and we were just about to close a deal on a Las Vegas trike in New Mexico in the USA when we received an email from a guy in Spain asking if we would be interested in his trike? The picture was of a Desperate Dan's V8. His name was Mike Chamberlain and I'll let him tell the story for a bit;

'Yes, the trike did start off in Chris' workshop in Great Yarmouth but, a third of the way through the build, he had another breakdown, smashed

the workshops up with a forklift and ceased trading. Don't get me wrong, we're still mates, sometimes these things just happen. Anyway I removed the trike to my own workshop and, over the next few years, the build continued until it was eight five percent complete. Then the dreaded SVA raised its ugly head. I 'phoned Chris and, with his help and contacts, got the trike registered from the back of a trailer four hours before SVA came in. Back in my workshop the build continued (that's why the log book says 01/06/03, but it wasn't actually on the road until summer of '04). The trike carries a DD VIN number - the last one issued via Chris – and even the logbook states that it's down as a Desperate Dan.

It's completely road legal with Type-Approved seat belts on the rear seat, fog lights, four

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way flashers, warning lights for everything and a cable-operated handbrake. The frame and forks are powdercoated candy apple blue, the front wheel is chrome with a polished caliper, stainless steel brake lines, a stainless steel mudguard and polished slab yokes, and there are stainless steel lockable stash boxes on each side. The floorboards are polished alloy checker plate, brakes are Rover front and Jag back through a Fiat servo and they're all operated via one foot pedal. It's on a Jag back axle with chrome wheels with seventeen inch wide tyres, and all the lights, handlebar controls and throttle grips are from Harley catalogues. The rad is at back

and was manufactured by my local rad shop and the water runs through the frame - when it exits the frame to the engine it goes into polished stainless steel pipe work, and there are two cooling fans at the rear, independently switched, to aid cooling. Every bearing, spring, damper, disc, caliper etc was purchased new and nothing was sourced from scrap yards - even the back axle was completely rebuilt. The gearbox is a brand new three-speed auto with torque converter from Rimmer Bros, and the exhausts are stainless too made by Gazelle.

The whole trike has been put together with stainless pike, dome and button head nuts and bolts, and the engine has been totally rebuilt with everything replaced and/or upgraded - 3.9 road race cams, reworked heads, Edelbrock manifold and four barrel carb, Mallory racing ignition system. Rover Parts International were involved with the rebuild and the setting up of the engine, and it alone cost in excess of £4500. The rocker boxes, front springs and sump are powdercoated in black chrome.

Total build cost was in excess of £25,000 and it took a staggering seven years. There are so many other bits on it that I would be here writing for weeks - the list goes on and on. My wife loves it and reckons I am daft for thinking of selling it. It has covered 7000 miles, never been out in the Winter, and hardly ever got wet. All the best, Mike.'

Wow, we had found our Desperate Dan trike and, what's more, it's the very last trike built by Chris Ireland. Mike tells me that Chris' son Matt did a lot of the work. I confirmed with Chris that this is the very last Desperate's trike and that Mike had supplied all components from new so we bought it and, finally, we owned a Desperate Dan's V8 trike. We got the trike back from Spain at Christmas '07 – some present, eh?

How does it go/handle? Without a doubt the best I have ridden so far! The trike weighs in at over a ton, but is very responsive both in handling and acceleration and at speed it is steady as a rock. The leading link front end handles the curves very well and the only fault, if there is one, is the tendency for the huge rear tyres to follow lorry grooves on the motorway. Does it do what we want? You bet your arse it does and then some! As I said, I'm over six foot six and way past twenty stone and, if you add all the camping gear and the trailer tent (not forgetting ☺



BODYWORK:

One-off stainless steel front mudguard/ stainless stash boxes/ seats/stainless wing fuel tank/stainless rear mudguards/stainless footboards by Desperate Dan's/Mike Chamberlain

ELECTRICS:

One-off loom by Desperate Dan's/Mike Chamberlain, twin peaked Bates headlights, aftermarket rear lights

PAINT:

None

POWDER COATING:

Candy blue

POLISHING:

Mike Chamberlain

ENGINEERING:

Desperate Dan's/Mike Chamberlain

THANKS TO:

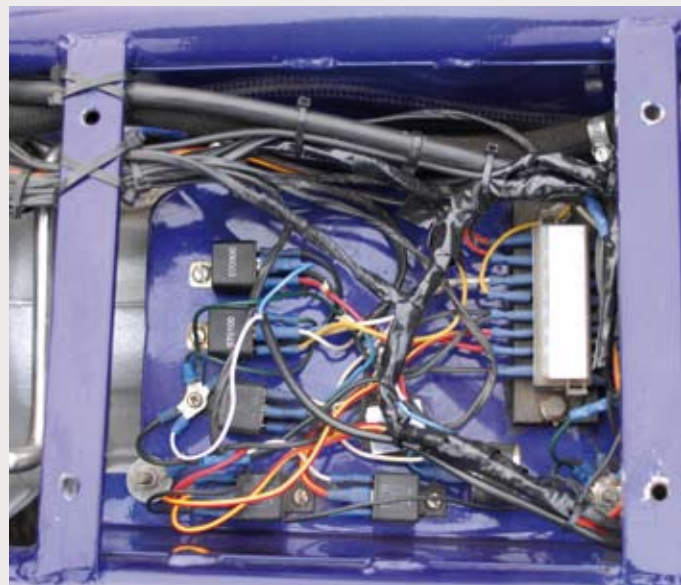
'Chris Ireland, Matt & the lads at the late lamented Desperate Dan's; Gazelle; Rover Parts International; BTW; & Mike Chamberlain for all his work & selling it to us!'



the long-suffering wife), it all weighs nearly two tons, but you watch it fly! The only modification we've made so far is to have the back of the driver's seat detachable so it's easy for the rear passengers to get on and off.

We started our rally season for 2008 by going to the NABD and, unbeknown to us, one of the members of Brothers of the Third Wheel had entered the trike into the 100% Biker-sponsored custom show where it won 'Best Car-Based Trike'. I was amazed as I'd only gone into the main marquee to get a drink when I heard my name being read out. It just goes to show what a fantastic trike Chris Ireland and Mike Chamberlain built when a ten year old trike can still wow the judges.

In five years time I hope to retire and start building my own trike - I only hope I can build something as good as this. As Mike C. said 'Desperate, you're a bloody genius'. ☺



CONTACTS

For more info on the Brothers of the Third Wheel trike club, go to www.btw-uk.co.uk