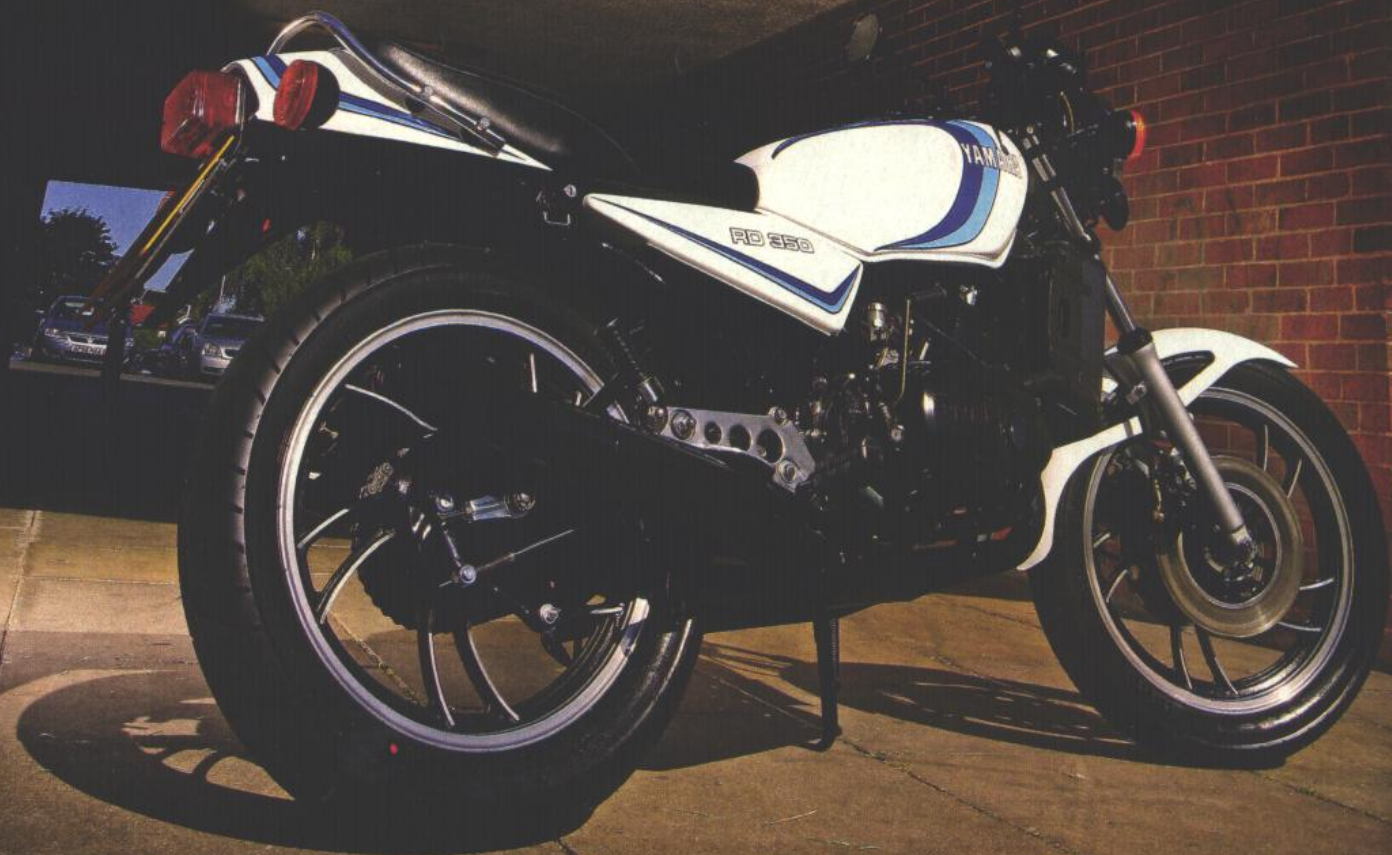


FEATURE: Yamaha 350LC

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Elsie returns

From frame and engine to finished article in five months - Gary Horton finally owns the bike he's been lusting after for a quarter of a century

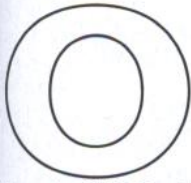


By **Olly Crick**
Photography **John Noble**

FEATURE: Yamaha 350LC



Gary Horton devoted five months to rebuilding his teenage dream-bike. The kids' art reminds him of life beyond the garage walls



opening Gary Horton's garage door, your nostrils are assaulted by an unmistakable waft of spent two-stroke fumes.

In front of us stands a Yamaha 350LC, glinting in the sunshine and good as new in its 1981 blue-and-white livery and period detailing, right down to the smallest metal plug caps and cable ties.

The bike has been popping wheelies through Gary's imagination for the last 26 years and at last – thanks to his own hard work, determination and perseverance – he's built one.

"I knew this bloke called Neil Harper when I was a lad," explains Gary. "He had a good job and bought himself a W-reg Yamaha 350LC in 1981. It was awesome. He was the envy of all the teenagers in town.

"I had an RD200DX at the time," Gary remembers. "I couldn't afford a 350. I bought a knackered one in 1987 when I was 22, but I always wanted a good 350LC. I always loved its blue and white colours."

Gary became a civil engineer, met and married his wife, Sarah, and moved away from his native Droitwich to start a family. He eventually became a recruitment manager for a transport firm and, seven years later, started up his own recruitment firm, moving back to Droitwich with Sarah and two kids in tow. At last Gary had sufficient spare income to succumb to his two-stroke fantasy.

"I was skimming through a magazine feature on a Fizzy (Yamaha FS1E) in WH Smith one afternoon when nostalgia set in. I wanted that 350LC, badly," says Gary. "I searched the internet and ended up buying what was advertised as – and what I thought was – a 350LC off eBay, but it wasn't what I was expecting. Not only was it was a complete mess close-up, it turned out to be an RD250 with 350 barrels... It also had a crack in the engine casing and a chunk missing

"I bought a tired one when I was 22 but I always wanted a good 350LC. I love the blue and white colours"

where a drive-chain had snapped."

Gary gritted his teeth and decided to chalk it all up to experience: "You live and learn. But I realised I ought to do some homework to avoid another disaster. I bought the Yamaha RD350 1980-1996 book by Rodger Taylor so now I'm a bit of a know-it-all about them," he says. "The dishonesty of a few people on internet auction sites was my only real disappointment with the whole project."

Luckily the 350LC bug had bitten deep enough to keep him motivated. Gary bought another one, this time with matching engine

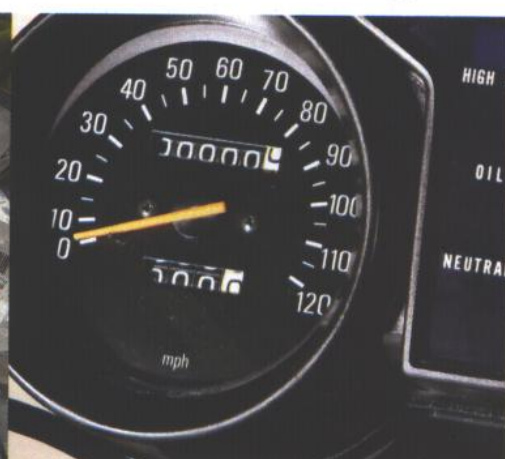
and frame numbers. "And that's all it was," he says, "just an engine and a frame."

Gary started to collect more parts in October 2006, hoping to build his dream motorcycle from scratch. His earlier disappointment led him to go for absolutely standard parts this time. He set aside at least two hours every night and worked every weekend to finish the project just five months later, in February 2007.

"The exhausts were the hardest part to find. I wanted the bike to be totally original and – after my previous experience – I wanted a decent set of pipes stamped 4L0 to match the engine and frame: 4L0 is correct for the 350; 4L1 for the 250. Luckily DK spares came up trumps.

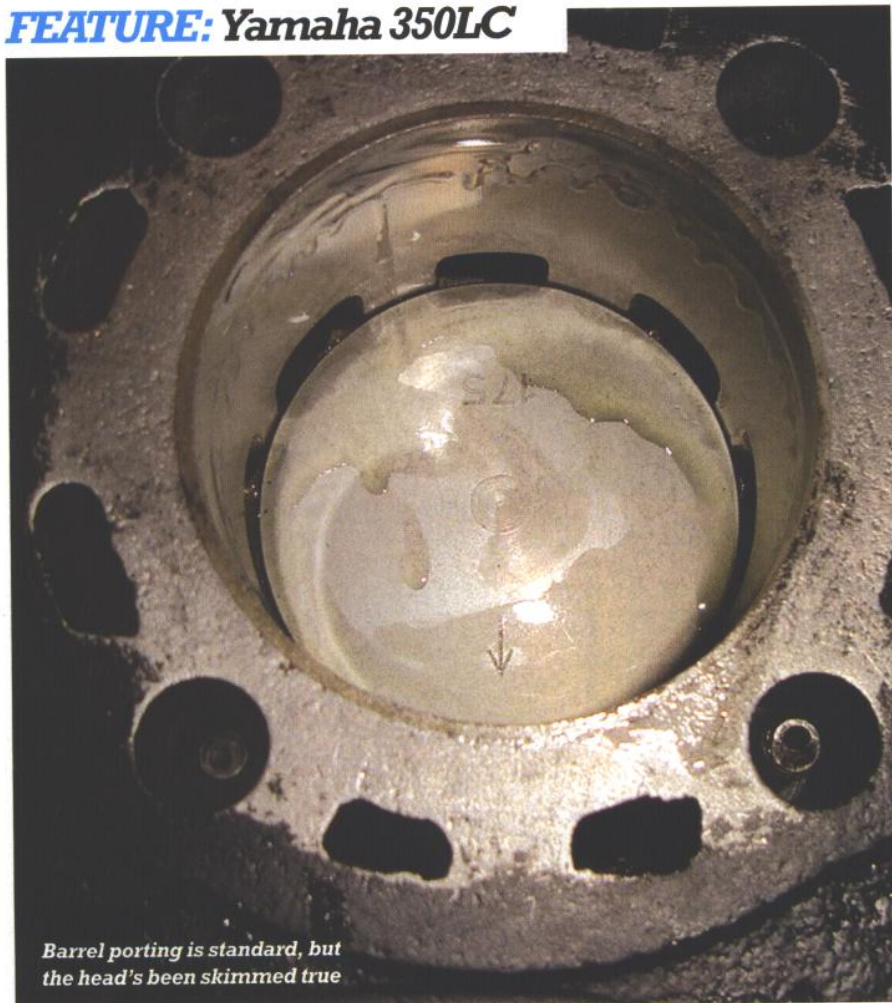
"The rear mudguard with the number-plate holder was also difficult to track down, as people tended to hack them off to give a more open look from the rear. Fortunately lots of LC parts are still available from Yamaha, which is where I bought the footrests, front mudguard, side panels, wiring loom and even Yamaha's original 'clean-white' paint."

Help with the build came from PJ Motorcycle Engineers of Wolverhampton, who skimmed the cylinder head slightly to true it up and fitted a new crankshaft, piston rings and little ends. The petrol tank was sprayed professionally and the frame powder-coated by a local company; the seat was recovered by RK Leighton in Birmingham. The rest is all Gary's own work – sourcing parts



TOP L-R: Bodywork back on ready for transfers; many parts are still available from Yamaha; clocks are wound back to zero. BOTTOM L-R: The frame was sprayed black by a local firm, Blackpole Powder Coating (01905 22201); four anodised headlight bolts were advertised on eBay for £27 – Gary bought his for 40p each

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Barrel porting is standard, but the head's been skimmed true

directly from classified ads and, yes, even the internet.

"You do have to be careful about the internet though," he says. "It's a convenient way of sourcing parts, but it's not the only way and it's not always cheapest. Take the green anodised pinch-bolts for the headlight bracket. I saw some advertised at £27 for four on eBay, then managed to buy them for just 40p each from Granby's (Ilkeston, Derbyshire). It pays to shop around; lots of the old spares specialists are still there if you look through the classified ads in the back of *Classic Bike* magazine."

More intricate parts of the rebuild included refurbishing a second-hand radiator: cleaning it, flushing it through and repainting it then buying a new round radiator cap. Gary also spray-painted the engine and exhausts satin-black using Plasti-Kote aerosol paint from B&Q. "It's reasonably cheap and heat-resistant, but make sure you store the cans upside down to prevent clogging," he advises.

Gary has also fitted slightly wider tyres than Yamaha originally intended – for "cosmetic and handling reasons" – going for Pirelli Sport Demons 100/90-18 on the front (as opposed to 90/90-18) and 120/90-18 on the rear (110/90-18).

The new rubber brake hoses are from PGM in Fife, while brake disc bolts, footrest hanger bolts and wheel spindle bolts are all stainless originals. "They all

“I polished the bolts with my electric drill – you just need a bit of perseverance”

have numbers on their heads,” he says. “I polished them up with my electric drill and a polishing mop – you just need a little perseverance. I even filed and polished the rear wheel spacer.”

Gary's attention to detail is painstaking, even going so far as to get metal plug-caps (again from Yamaha) and sourcing special period-looking cable ties. He even has a running-in sticker over the rev-counter, having touched up the red of the tachometer and temperature gauge with red permanent marker when he stripped the clocks. The blue graphics on the tank and side-panels were obtained from www.rdlccrazy.co.uk and applied by Gary, too.

As for the original eBay bike: having more scruples than its previous owner, Gary decided to break it down and sell the working parts he didn't need, in the end keeping only the wheels. He stripped and painted them himself one Sunday and polished the rim edges with Solvol Autosol.

With the bike complete, Gary found himself facing what turned out to be the most frustrating part of the job – getting the





Olly on his way to the chippy. "Hold the fish, I may be some time..."

WE PRISED GARY'S PRECIOUS 350LC OUT OF THE GARAGE **TO TAKE IT FOR A SPIN**

Folding up the right footrest for kick-start clearance, Gary's immaculate LC starts first time. Pull away and we bog down – this isn't a four-stroke – a couple thousand more revs, slip the clutch slightly and we're in motion. The stock exhausts sound great and smell better, so I ride back and forth along the same stretch of road a few times just to fill my lungs. The riding position is so simple, the handlebars (and complete bike) so narrow. This is the Kate Moss of the motorcycle world.

Steering lock is huge, I forgot how simple turning around could be with no lock-stops to impede balance. The 350 brings out the rebel in me, I feel I could put a foot down and spin the bike around me on the throttle.

The steering isn't particularly quick, but the bike's lightness helps its agility and the profile of its Pirelli Sport Demon tyres mean it tips in predictably. Flicking (and it really is flicking on a bike this light) from side-to-side through a left-right flick-flack makes you understand why these bikes have a cult following. The motor takes off at 6000rpm, it just seems a shame that its power-band is cut short with a 9500rpm red-line, but first gear in this rev-range is truly fantastic.

On the negative side, the single-piston front brakes, which may have been okay in the early Eighties, possess little feel and take some getting used to; the rear drum brake is fine and seemed the perfect strength. The front end drops into potholes, really jarring your wrists through the handlebars, but that's how they were in those days.

Ridden for a while, engine vibration makes fingers tingle, and I remembered how difficult it used to be to find neutral. Orange indicator dash-signals add to the nostalgia, the indicators themselves look like they'd be more at home on a Foden.

All credit to Gary for this beautiful restoration: he's recreated an icon – and it's probably better than the one he lusted after in 1981.