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COLLECTORS' EDITION

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BARBER VINTAGE FESTIVAL

Bikes on show in Birmingham

Not the Birmingham in the British Midlands. No, this quirky show of ancient and modern bikes attracted 60,000 visitors from all over the USA

Words Rachael Clegg Photography Erick Runyon, Hedy Hodgson

'ONE LIFE, LIVE IT' read one man's tattoo at this year's Barber Vintage Festival. And clearly it's an adage that 99% of the 60,000 visitors embraced at this year's tenth-anniversary festival at the world-famous Barber Vintage Motorsport Museum in Birmingham, Alabama.

Cool custom-bike kids, septuagenarian racers, restorers, bands, motorcycle manufacturers and collectors of some of the most valuable two-wheeled machines in the world gathered across the 830-hectare site to marvel at rare and oddball machines. This mish-mash of characters – all living one life and loving it – made for an atmosphere that combined American slick with Blitz spirit.

And it was Blitz spirit that rescued Dave Roper's weekend's racing. The former TT rider raced his idiosyncratic-looking 250cc Harley-Davidson Aermacchi in the 350cc GP race but retired with technical problems – so he borrowed a 350cc Ducati and won the following day's 350cc GP race! 'That's

what it's like at Barber. People help each other out.'

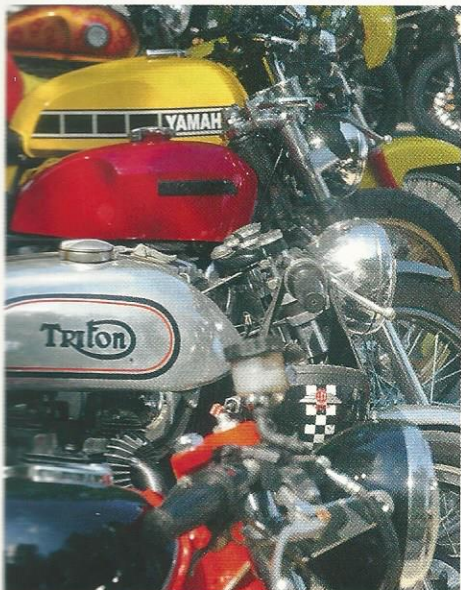
But racing is just one part of the Barber Vintage Festival. There are trials rides, a Wall of Death, stunt shows, the infamous swapmeet, and the Century Parade which is specifically for pre-WWI machines. Kevin Grubb entered the parade on his immaculately restored 1913 Rudge Multi. 'It's taken seven years to restore,' he said, 'but it's very special to get machines like this running on a track and to see them in action.' The Rudge's various levers look as if they'd require Shiva-like dexterity to operate.

Among other machines in the parade was a 1911 Triumph, a 1914 Harley twin and a 1913 Harley single, yet the motorcycles at the festival spanned all decades. Among the stand-out collections of the weekend was the 70-plus Vincents brought to Barber from all corners of the United States. One of them was Glenn Bewley's well-patinated 'Lightning-ised Black Shadow', which was found in a house sold as part of a tax foreclosure in Philadelphia. It

was started up for the first time in 50 years just two days before the festival. 'The fact it started at all was amazing,' said Bewley.

This machine, made of parts from various Vincent models, was somewhat incongruously on display alongside the immaculately restored 1947 Vincent 'Gunga Din'. One of the most famous race machines in history, it was named by *Motor Cycling* test rider Charlie Markham in the 1940s, after the Rudyard Kipling poem in which Indian water-bearer Gunga Din sacrifices his life for a British soldier's and is dubbed 'a better man than I am, Gunga Din'. Markham chose the name on the grounds that the Vincent's abilities exceeded his own.

It's this contrast of new and old, dishevelled and pristine that defines the Barber Vintage Festival: few events manage to combine slick professionalism with bashed-about quirkiness quite so wonderfully. Maybe that's because its 60,000 visitors have one life, and are living it well – if only for the weekend.



Clockwise from top left

The legendary swapmeet at Barber; the Wall of Death; sidecar racing is one of several competitive events during the festival; spectacular Barber Museum foyer; just a few of the thousands of machines present; the 'Gunga Din' Vincent.

