

COMMANDO PERFORMANCE

Want to get a Norton Commando to go fast? Steve Maney is the man to talk to.

Steve Maney builds not only very fast Nortons, he also builds very robust ones – Nortons that are seemingly more resilient to damage than the man who builds and races them.

That judgement is based on the Seeley-framed Norton Commando perched on the workbench in Maney's Yorkshire, UK, factory. Maney's usually immaculate Commando racer sported a few scratch and scuff marks, but damage was minimal – certainly superficial compared to the injuries Maney was nursing.

"It was the worst crash I've ever been involved in," recounts Maney, who was caught up in a multi-bike start-line incident in the 2010 International Island Classic at Phillip Island.

"I had six broken ribs with multiple fractures in each, my lung was torn and collapsed, I broke the top off my collarbone and the head of my femur was fractured," adds Maney. "I spent 10 days in hospital, three of those in intensive care, and ended up having to stay in Melbourne for four weeks before I could fly home.

"It was a tough time as my business is a small one – just me and the two guys who operate the CNC machines. I couldn't even reply to my customer emails, but we're back on track now."

The business Maney refers to is Middlestown Engineering, or Steve Maney Norton as it's more commonly known these days (www.stevemaney.com).

It's a business Steve and his dad Norman started back in 1989, initially doing engineering work for the railway and mining industries. Twenty-two years on Middlestown Engineering is the world's leading supplier of Norton Commando race parts.

"I'd always had an interest in Nortons, so the business grew from that," says Maney. "I'd been racing 750cc Nortons since 1975, so as I extracted more and more power, and the original cylinders, crankcases and cranks started to break, I designed and made my own. I would make small batches, use a few in my own engines and sell the rest to other racers.

"This soon expanded and became the mainstay of our business, and since 1992 we have concentrated solely on my up-rated Norton parts. Seventy per cent of what we do is for racing, with 30 per cent for modified road bikes.

"It is performance parts that we concentrate on rather than re-manufacturing stock parts for original Commandos. Andover Norton is still making spares for Nortons, so there's not much point manufacturing replicas of OEM parts that can still be bought new."

Maney's Norton obsession commenced as an 18-year-old in 1975, when he started hill climbing on a modified Norton Atlas.



Clockwise from below: crankshafts are made in batches of 40; each crank starts as a 70kg piece of billet and ends up 8.2kg; big-port heads awaiting over-size valves; donor heads awaiting modification; Seeley frame meets Commando engine; Maney-Commando powerplant.



"I then went road racing with a Seeley Commando in the late '70s," says Maney. "But after only a few meetings it became obvious that the Commando was well past its use-by date, and as I had no interest in Japanese two-strokes, that chapter of my motorcycle racing came to an end."

Six years later though, whilst walking round the Mallory Park pits at a UK race meeting, his then girlfriend (and soon to be wife), Val, asked how Maney knew so many racers.

"I told her that I had raced bikes in the past," recalls Maney. "She looked at me quizzically and asked why I no longer raced. I could tell by the tone of her voice that she really thought I ought to be racing."

"Here was a beautiful woman who was saying I should go racing. I thought I had better marry her there and then. So I did."

"Since my earlier racing exploits, Classic racing had taken off in a big way, so there was somewhere to race the bikes I liked," says Maney.

"And it just so happened I had a Norton Commando engine and a Featherbed frame in the back bedroom of my house. This formed the basis of the bike I raced in many guises for the next 10 years – and the bike that helped get my business started."

During those return-to-racing years Maney set up Middlestown Engineering, so it wasn't always possible for him to race full-time.

"I did manage to win many races, and even a few championships," says Maney. "This racing and engineering environment proved to be excellent for testing and developing all the parts I sell today."

Middlestown Engineering is a small operation. In addition to Maney there are two CNC operators, plus a part-time fabricator who assists with exhaust system manufacture.

"I went 12 years without a CNC machine, but finally bit the bullet in 2001. I didn't even know how to turn it on, so I spent £1200 (\$AUD1925) doing a two-day course. Then I spent six months with my head in a book."

That investment paid off, and these days Maney manufactures crankshafts in batches of 40 at a time.

"We start with 70kg of billet steel and end up with a finished crank weighing 18lb (8.2kg)," explains Maney. "It's the most complicated part we make – and it costs £1150 (\$AUD1845)."

Maney used to build complete bikes for customers, a time-consuming hand-built process, but as business began to take off he had to make a choice.

"I don't build complete bikes anymore, but I can supply all the parts for a customer to build their own. I've built maybe 12 complete bikes all up."

"Maney offers 750cc, 850cc and 920cc kits, as well as a monster 1007cc option."

"Everything fits the standard Commando engine, except the 1007cc kit, which has an 83mm bore and 93mm stroke. It puts out 97hp at the rear wheel on a Dynojet dyno – not bad for a '60s pushrod twin."

Maney will sell a complete engine for

£8500 (\$AUD13,650), but is happy to supply individual components.

"If you want to hot up a Commando, then we've got the part," grins Maney. "Since 1990 hundreds of races and dozens of championships have been won by racers using our barrels."

Maney's aluminium barrels save 5kg over the original items and cost £639

(\$AUD2005) for a non-standard stroke.

"We produce our own race camshafts (£183), lightweight performance pushrods (£89), two-into-one race exhausts (£549), forged hi-comp piston kits (£299 to £329) – you name it, we can supply it."

Maney is particularly proud of his cylinder-head modifications to the

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(\$AUD1025) – unless you want the 'big mutha' 1007cc version, in which case you'll need £739 (\$AUD1185).

Racing crankcases, cast and machined by Maney, go for £869 (\$AUD1395), while an aircraft quality Cr-Ni-Mo alloy billet crankshaft adds a further £1150 (\$AUD1845) – or £1250

venerable British twin.

"The standard head is okay for the stresses of racing and being modified," says Maney. "I move the valve guide angle and re-shape the port."

Below: You'd be smiling too if you'd just sold another 1007cc engine for \$13,650!



“When tuning Nortons most of the performance increase comes directly from the cylinder-head,” adds Maney. “We offer three stages of tune, with the ports increased and shaped to suit each different valve size.”

A donor head is required, with Maney’s Stage 1 mods costing £480 (\$AUD770), Stage 2 £760 (\$AUD1220) and Stage 3 (with 5mm oversize inlets and 3mm oversize exhausts) a hefty £930 (\$AUD1490).

Maney is also proud of his 1007cc conversion kit for the 750/850 Commando engine.

“I designed and manufactured this engine in 2003, primarily for use in a double engine streamliner,” explains Maney. “All the engine internals have been redesigned to accommodate the oversize bore and stroke – this means it is not just an over-bored 850cc Commando engine.”

The 1007cc kit comprises crankcases, crankshaft, cylinder barrel, pistons, head gasket and intermediate timing gear for a price of £3195 (\$AUD5125).

“Over the years I’ve managed to win quite a number of races, which attracted the attention of the magazines, and ultimately that got me noticed by a few very American sponsors,” says Maney.

“From 1999 through to 2001 I raced almost exclusively in the USA. These days my work tends to keep me from racing regularly, although I did manage to get back to the USA in 2004 for Daytona and Willow Springs – and to Phillip Island in 2009 and 2010.

“I think the most memorable milestones were winning Daytona the first time, and getting over 100hp out of my 920 engine – they were both special.”

In the world of Norton, Steve Maney understandably commands respect. ■



Maney at Phillip Island in 2009 – both bike and rider returned home unscathed that year.

