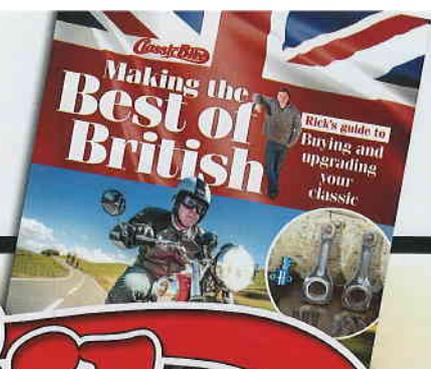


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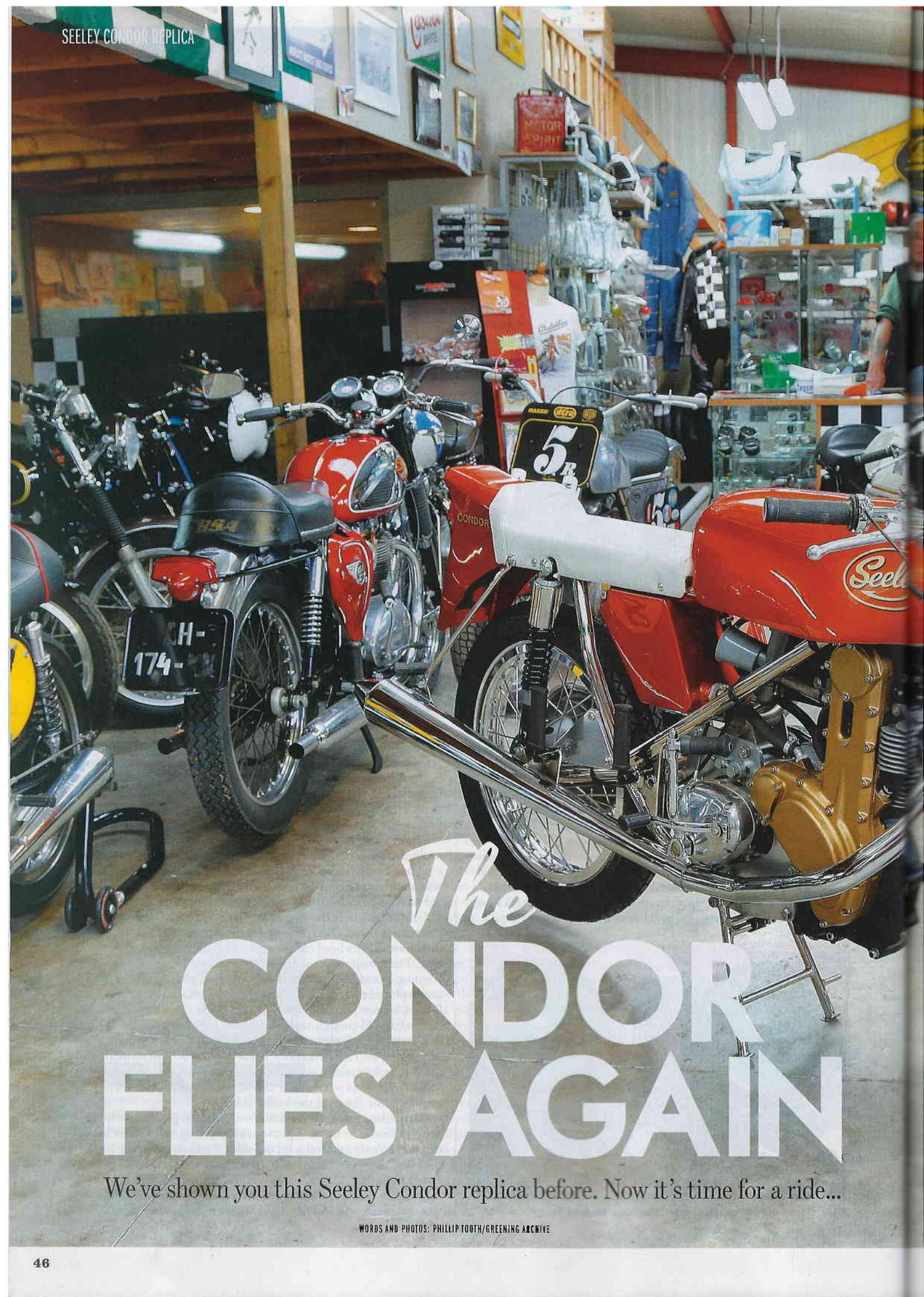


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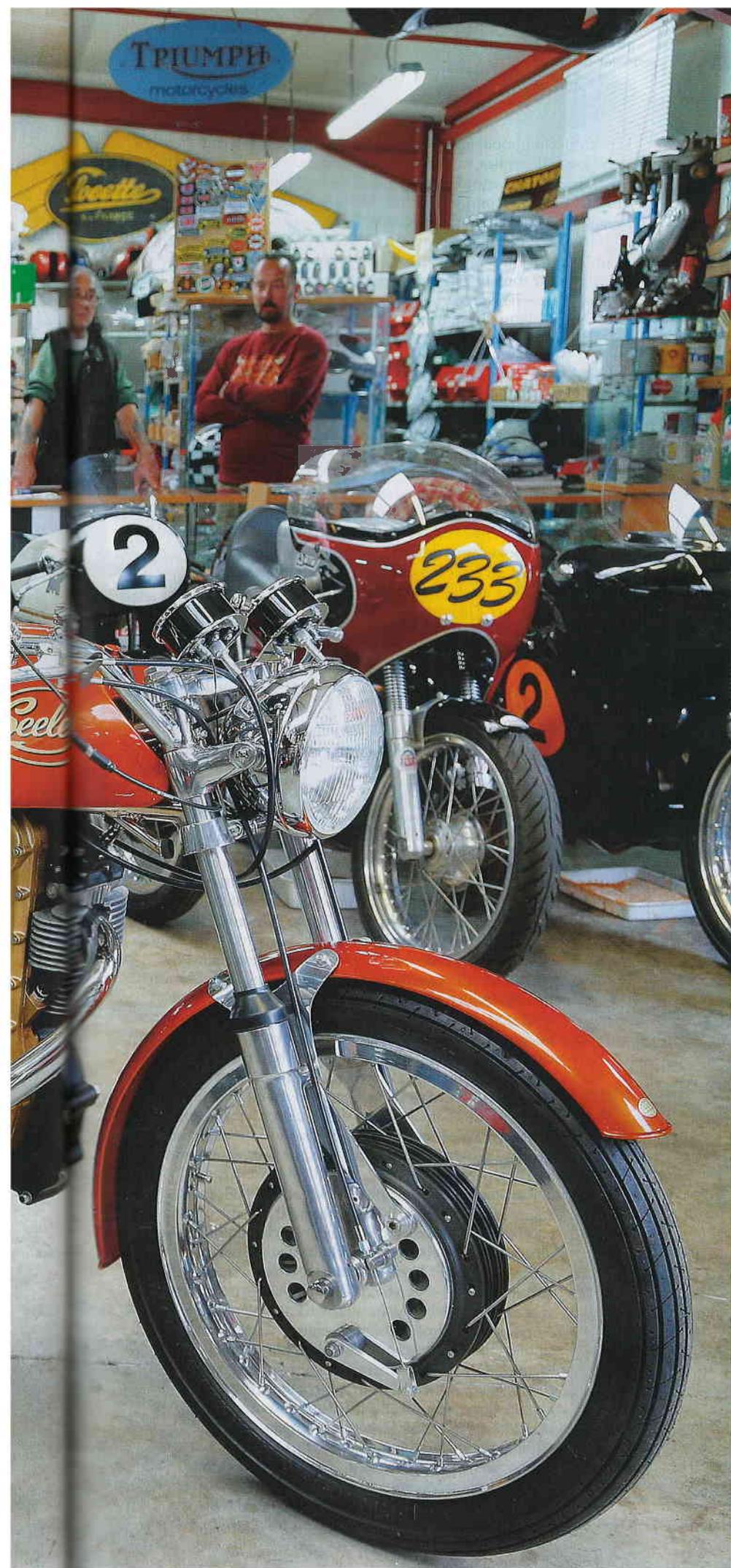
SEELEY CONDOR REPLICA



*The*  
**CONDOR  
FLIES AGAIN**

We've shown you this Seeley Condor replica before. Now it's time for a ride...

WORDS AND PHOTOS: PHILLIP TOOTH/GREENING ARCHIVE



**T**hirty years ago, I was sitting in the auction room at the Stafford Classic Bike show when the next lot was wheeled in front of the auctioneer. "Gentlemen," said the man with the hammer. "Here we have a fine Seeley G50 racing motorcycle. What am I bid?" Two seats along from me, a smartly dressed man with grey hair and steel-blue eyes stood up and in a firm, clear voice, said: "Excuse me, but that is not a Seeley."

The auctioneer tried to ignore the disturbance and carry on, but the man persisted. Again and again, he repeated his statement until the auctioneer finally gave way and asked: "And who, sir, are you?"

"I'm Colin Seeley," came the reply. Without a second thought, the auctioneer ordered the bike to be removed from sale, and Colin sat down to a round of applause. So when Mr Seeley gives his seal of approval to a bike with his name on it, you know it has to be special. The Condor replica built by Frank Chatokhine certainly is.

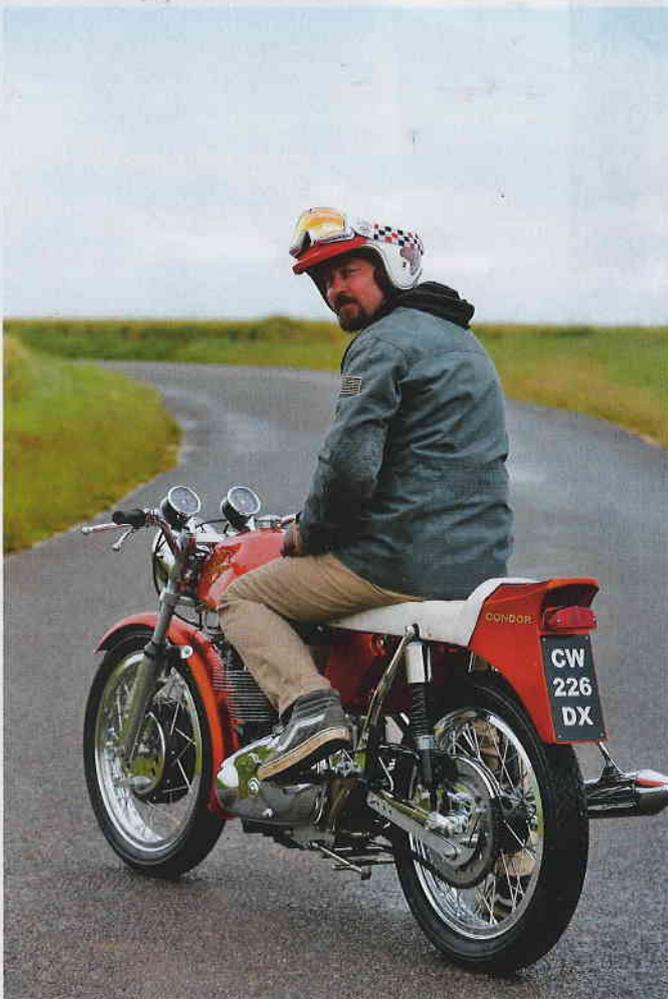
The Frenchman with a passion for British motorcycles (featured in the July issue of *CB*) takes up the story: "Ever since I was a kid, the Condor has been my dream bike," he says. "I started working full-time in the family motorcycle business when I was 14 years old. A year later I rode a Mk3 Seeley Matchless G50 at Monthéry and was so impressed with its finesse and precision – it was like riding a lightweight 125cc racer with a 500cc engine installed. The Condor is a Seeley race bike for the road – who wouldn't dream of riding one?"

Roland Chatokhine, Frank's father, probably sowed the Condor seed in Frank's brain with stories about visiting the ten-day motorcycle show at London's Olympia in January 1971, where Colin launched the Condor from a much smaller stand than those displaying the best from BSA, Triumph, Norton, Suzuki, Ducati, Honda, Kawasaki and BMW. "I saw the Condor on display there," says Roland, who had an NVT franchise selling Norton, Triumph and BSA in Chartres, 60 miles west of Paris. "It looked stunning!"

"Everyone I spoke to said that it was a strange bike," continues Frank. "But for me, if Colin Seeley built it, it was perfect." Perfect, but outside his price range. In 1971 the Condor came with a cool £1000 price tag, which made it the most expensive road bike money could buy. Only seven complete Condors were made – all finished in the same metallic flame orange paintwork – and three rolling chassis so that people could fit their own engine. Today you'd need a second mortgage to buy an original.

Then a customer, enthused by Frank's obsession with the Seeley roadster, asked him to make a replica. "I might not be able to afford my own, but at least I would have the pleasure of building one!"

His customer bought a Matchless G50 engine, a Quaife five-speed gearbox and a Mk3 frame. To begin with, Frank only had the photograph he had ►►



■ Frank, about to put a few more miles on the replica 'just to make sure'



■ Five-speed Quaife gearbox has road ratios for best driveability/speed compromise

kept from childhood and a copy of a magazine road test, but two years later the replica was coming along nicely. "Then I met Colin at Coupes Moto Légende in Dijon and showed him photos of the bike being built," continues Frank. "He was a bit surprised when he saw what looked like a Condor." Now a slightly 80-year-old, Colin has never been one to waste words. "In the night, here we go again!" says Colin. "But as I spoke to Frank, I was impressed by the trouble he took to get things right, and how he stressed it wasn't a fake – he wanted to build the best possible replica."

Colin gave Frank his business card and said he would help the Frenchman if he could. So a pile of photographs of the original Condor soon landed in the Charlotte postbox. "The replica took four years," says Frank. "One for plumbing, one for finding parts like wheel hubs and Seeley forks, and two years to build."

Late in 2015, Frank emailed Colin a photograph of the replica's fuel tank, resplendent in that metallic flame orange and with the gold Seeley logo. "I didn't get a reply for a couple of days, so I was a bit worried that it wasn't right – but then he answered and said that he wanted to see the bike as soon as it was finished, so he came to Paris where I was going to put it on my stand at the Salon Moto Légende." When Colin viewed the replica, he was stunned. "The Condor looked amazing," he said, revising his words carefully. "What an achievement for Frank and his team!"

Before we go for a ride, let's take a closer look. The Mk3 frame was made by Roger Titchmarsh, who uses the original jigs from the Seeley frame shop and is the only manufacturer approved by Colin Seeley. Made from Reynolds 531, it weighs about as much as a jambon baguette yet is rigid enough to always keep the wheels in line. Before it was nickel plated, it was modified to Condor specification by the addition of a battery box, lugs to take pillion footrest hangers, and the steering lock stops. Frank tracked down the Reynolds

## 'BUILDING THIS HAS BEEN BETTER THAN A DREAM'

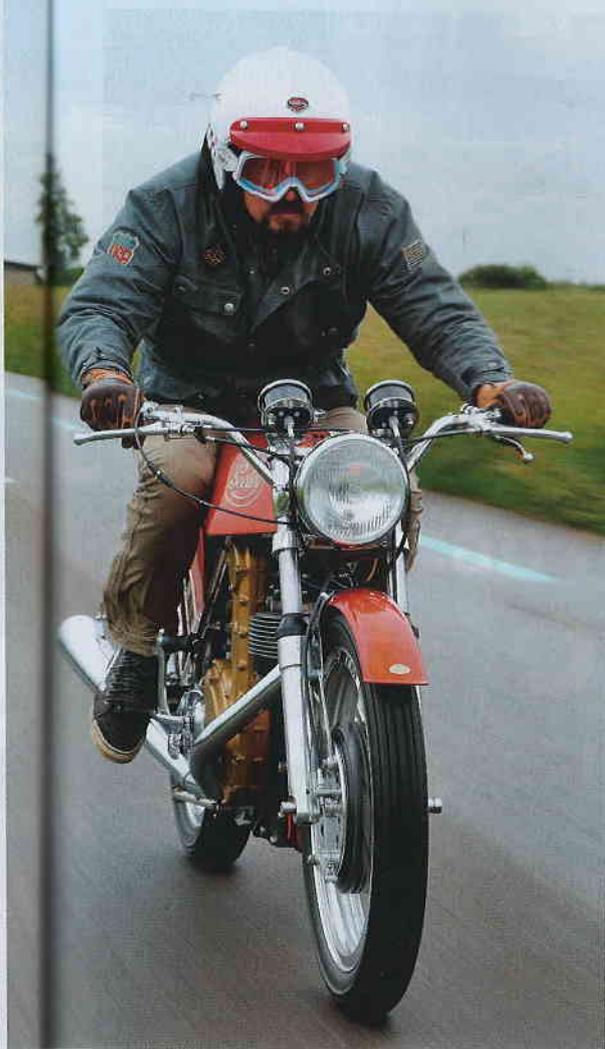
531 decals at a bicycle shop in the US. "You can get the green 531 decals anywhere," he says. "But I wanted the correct ones with green apostrophes

around the '531'. The American wouldn't sell them to a Frenchman, so I called a friend in the USA and asked him to buy them for me."

Seeley alloy sliders for the fork legs were supplied by BSA Gold Star racer John Cronshaw, along with Norton Roadholder tubes and internal springs. Up front is a replica Seeley Electron hub with two separate single-leading-shoe brakes, supplied by Molnar Precision. Colin preferred a single-leading-shoe brake, claiming that braking is more progressive than with a twin-leading shoe, and the rider gets more feel. Like the original, the Molnar replica uses a clever floating cam design which provides a powerful servo action. At the rear end is a drilled Seeley magnesium hub, modified to carry a speedometer drive.

Respected G50 specialist Mick Taberer built the engine, fitting a smaller inlet valve and a slightly lower-compression piston than standard. Mick recommended using an Amal with a 36mm choke instead of the original 38mm. "These mods make it more tractable and smoother," says Mick. The drive-side mainshaft was modified to carry the alternator – the original Condor used a front-mounted, belt-driven dynamo. The timing chain cover, cam box and oil pump block are all magnesium. The anti-corrosion gold finish is a perfect foil for the paintwork. Colin points out that the G50 engine didn't have a valve lifter, but he concedes that the one devised by Frank is an improvement on a roadster, adding: "It will be a lot easier to start now!"

The five-speed gearbox cluster was supplied by Quaife, with road ratios chosen to give the best compromise for driveability and speed. And there is a kickstart – as Colin said when he built the original



■ Attention to detail verges on the anally retentive



■ Frank and his dad are Seeley superfans



Condor, nobody wants to bump-start a road bike. Inside the chrome-plated Dominator chaincase is a Norton clutch and Bob Newby belt-drive conversion. A modern BTH magneto with a built-in advance curve supplies the sparks.

"The original Condor used a rear chainguard modified from one off an early Commando," says Frank, "so that at least was a relatively easy part to find!" Both the 3½-gallon (16-litre) alloy petrol tank and seven-pint (four-litre) oil tank were fabricated in France by Lucien Cordonnier of Corki Racing, along with the seat base/number plate unit. Lucien also made the long reverse-cone megaphone – the original was designed by Dr Gordon Blair of Queen's University, Belfast, who had worked with Colin on the single-cylinder 500cc two-stroke Seeley-QUB. Frank made the exhaust pipe by cutting and welding sections of tube, followed by lots of polishing. He also made the swan-neck bars and the long front mudguard, which was fabricated from two G50 Matchless guards. Paintwork was finished by Aerotech Nico at Chartres, who also created the Seeley tank decals.

There is one original Condor part on Frank's replica – the centrestand. "John Cronshaw found it when he was racing in America, and he posted it to me," says the grateful Frenchman. "It was a bit bent, but that was no problem. It was something that Colin Seeley Racing Developments made!"

Frank points at the plastic velocity stack on the MkI Concentric Amal. "I searched for one of these for three years, and even tried to make one with 3D printing. Then, one week before the Paris Salon, a friend pleaded to see the Condor because he would be away on holiday and miss the salon. So I showed it him, and he said there was only one problem – I didn't have the velocity stack. He said a week ago he had been at an autojumble in England and saw a big plastic bellmouth in the original Amal box on a stall. He picked it up, and the stallholder said 'one pound'. So he bought it."

The friend was going to the airport later that day, but would leave it in his dustbin. "I jumped on my bike and rode to Paris that

night," says Frank. "I didn't want to wait until the morning, in case the refuse collectors got there first!" After a quick polish, he screwed his prize onto the Concentric. "Now the bike was perfect, and we were ready for Paris." He has an almost mystical look in his eyes as he adds: "Building this bike has been better than a dream for me." It's time to fire up his imagination.

Starting this race-bred motorcycle couldn't be easier. Use the valve lifter to ease it over compression... and kick. A modern BTH magneto and a properly set-up carb ensure a first-time start, and the Matchless motor settles down to a tickover that would make a Panther owner jealous. There's no need for boy racer clutch-slipping and throttle-blipping heroics to get a move on.

Wait until you reach the open road and then make the most of the gearbox. Spin the engine towards 6000rpm and the Condor really flies. Colin claimed only 45bhp for his original, but with a dry weight of just 310lb (141kg) this slim projectile will soon whistle up to 120mph. There's a lot to be said for building a lighter motorcycle – besides maximising the power-to-weight ratio for better acceleration, the handling and stopping are also improved. There's not so much as a twitch from the handlebars as you power the bike through high-speed bends. You can lean the Condor right over without worrying about scraping the footpegs, which shouldn't surprise anyone as this chassis was designed by a bloke who was building bikes for Hailwood and Sheene. There's no doubt in your mind that it's going to be good.

Goes like stink, stops, handles, and even starts easy. This is a seriously good piece of kit. No wonder Frank wants to do more miles on it 'just to be sure' before passing it on to the owner. "The Condor performs better than I ever hoped it would," he says with a beaming smile. "The engine is smooth and powerful, and the chassis, suspension and brakes are perfect. And it feels so light."

He has every right to look so pleased. "When he saw it, Colin told me something that touched me. He said: 'this is not a replica, but the next chapter of the Condor story'. I couldn't ask for more! ▶▶