

Honda 400A Combo

Mike Brierley - "No man is an Island"

Like most, the thought of putting pen to paper is more daunting for me than getting on a bike for the first time.

My name is Mike Brierley; I've been a member of NABD for some time. I've often thought it's about time I had a go at riding a bike, after all, it has been one of my ambitions since I was at Portland Training College for the Disabled in Mansfield, Notts.

It was there in 1967 I got my first real taste for biking; a mate of mine at the time, Jerry, let me ride pillion with him on his BSA Bantam, after that I was hooked. You ask 'Why did you wait so long?'. In those days, the 'powers that be' made decisions whether you could ride a motorcycle or not; in the case of myself, after passing my car test, the entitlement to a provisional motorcycle was withdrawn without explanation. Thanks for a more enlightened age now! At the time, not to be beaten, I transferred my energies into 'Hot Rodding and Customising' cars, this I did for a number of years.

Now, with my age approaching 53 years, it was becoming obvious to me if I didn't do something now about riding a motorcycle, I never would, so I was gonna go for it.

Having had polio since I was 9 months old and enduring years of corrective surgery, I was finally left with a paralysed right arm and severely weakened left leg. Over the years, this has left me with a degenerative disc problem - but what the heck! My Dad always said, with some truth, "There's always someone worse off." With this in mind, I started to research the various adaptations shown in NABD magazine 'Open House' and when I went to a bike show at G-Mex last year, went to their stand. They were very friendly and helpful and Pete 'the Hat' Murray gave me plenty of advice on adaptations and types of bikes to look out for.

My first attempt to get hold of a bike did not go too well. I had decided to go for an automatic, so when a MotoGuzzi 'I' Connect came up for sale, I rang the dealer up. Things were going well until I mentioned that I would probably modify it, or even Trike it! The conversation then took a downward turn, ending with a refusal to sell the bike to me. It was my fault, I had forgotten the golden rule of Hot

Rodding, 'Don't tell the seller you intend to butcher their pride and joy if you get your hands on it!'

It wasn't long after that I managed to locate a 1979 Honda 400A, which proved to be a better choice for me by far. Having just insured the bike, I was told by John Ward (a NABD member who works for Carole Nash Insurance) that insurance companies are very reluctant to insure modified

lever and switchgear in almost the original position.

With this sorted, the bike was trailered to Liverpool, my mate doing the driving. This was early March and 2 weeks later, Ian & David had completed the job and the bike was ready to collect. I was very impressed with how quickly they had managed to complete the conversion - this included supplying and fitting the

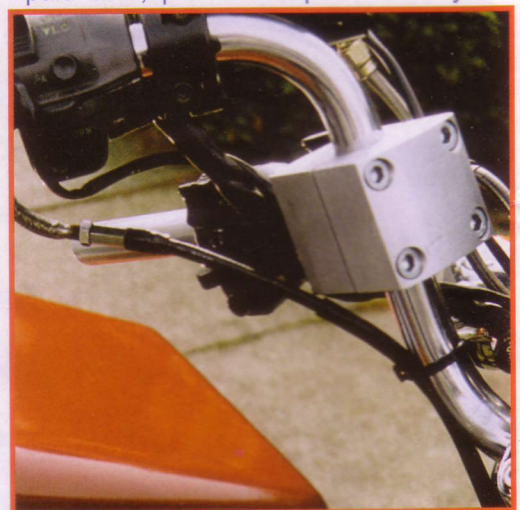


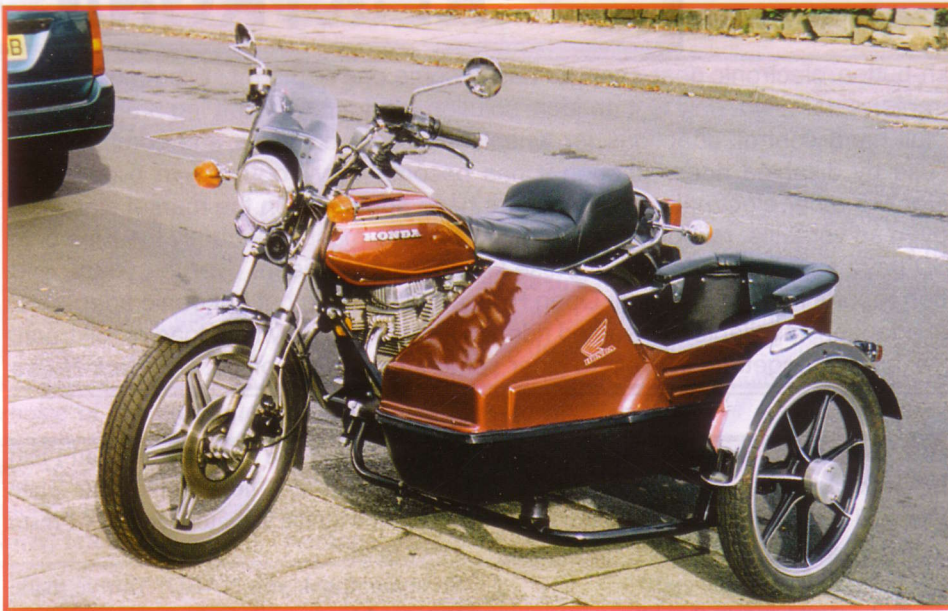
bikes and sidecars (attaching a sidecar to a bike is a modification), especially to provisional licence holders. So, after an anxious wait, I was relieved to hear from John that I was insured (and at a reasonable cost too).

The next step was to contact Billy, the NABD's Adaptions Officer, who was very helpful and explained the procedures for applying for a grant towards the cost of adapting the bike. I obtained a quote from Ian & David Tivey who specialise in right to left handle bar controls and with my grant now approved, there was one problem to sort out before giving the bike to Ian & David.

The Honda 400A has a handbrake which is applied when the bike is parked, this is located on the left handle bar; as the throttle was going to be repositioned on the left side handle bar, I figured that I should come up with a solution to the problem before I gave the bike to Ian & David. I do like doing things for myself and the solution I came up with was to have Hi Rise Handlebars fitted so that the extra clamp on bar could be fitted, with the handbrake

throttle assembly, hydraulic front brake master cylinder, brake light switch, re-wiring starter button and fitting new handle bars, hand brake lever and switches. I was very pleased with the end result and the few times I have used it to date I've found the conversion very functional and have encountered no problems. While the bike was in Liverpool, I had turned my attention to the Velorex Sidecar I'd bought from a biker called Rex who lived in the wilds of East Lancashire (the price he was asking reflected the condition). The £50 was paid over, plus some petrol money





and Rex and a couple of his sons delivered it the next day. They were my first encounter with real bikers for a long time and just as I remembered bikers in the past; they were very helpful and friendly and gave me a lot of helpful tips on attaching the sidecar to the bike.

I was up very early the next day to survey the purchase; I thought to myself, "Boy, the Velorex Sidecar is ugly or what?" It was all there and my original intention had been to use the chassis only. This was in a very sound condition, the wheel which must have been chromed at some time in its life had seen better days; from what Rex had told me about some of his and his mates escapades with the Velorex, it came as no surprise to me. I now turned my attention to the sidecar body; it looked like a giant 'Moses Basket' fitted with a bay window! It's only redeeming feature was the wedge shaped front, which played some lip service to aerodynamics. It was now I drew on my experience of 'Hot Rodding'; first I did a 'Top Chop' and removed about 2 feet in height and the roof, using my trusty old angle grinder. Then with the same tool, I took 18 inches out of the centre, this was riveted and fibre-glassed back together and required a lot of sanding and shaping to make the 2 halves meet. Next I made a wooden frame, this was bonded in. I now had something to which I could attach the upholstery I had made. The body was now given to a biker friend, Steve, who did a fabulous job of final preparation and spraying it Candy Apple Red to match the bike.

In the meantime, I had stripped and repainted the sidecar chassis and put on a new wheel I had found at Aintree Bike Jumble earlier in the year. The

chassis and body were reunited with each other and a new chrome fender added, fitted backwards to make mounting easier.

It left only wiring the lights and adding a wheel dust cover made out of aluminium to finish the job. Rex had given me some sidecar fittings, but none to fit the bike. Over the previous months I had wasted a lot of time trying to locate the right fittings for the bike; in the end I had to bite the bullet and splash out on some new ones, which I got from Charnwood Sidecars. The last thing to do before photographing the bike was to fit the re-profiled and re-upholstered seat.



To say I am very pleased with the overall look of the bike would be an understatement; I am over the moon. There are a few small jobs to do yet (new handlebar grips, an aeroscreen and a cover to keep the rain out of the sidecar); this I hope to complete over the winter months.

This has been a long journey, almost a year; most of the delays were because

I wanted to do some of the work myself. It has been well worth the effort and, as the saying goes, 'No man is an island' and with that in mind, I would like to give my sincere thanks to the following people, without their help, none of this would have happened:

My wife Ann who kept a cheery smile on her face when mine was full of gloom and for the umpteen cups of tea and standing in a freezing garage holding nuts and bolts for me.

Stuart, my best mate who built the outfit with me and came round month after month till it was finished.

The NABD, unsung heroes, your help was invaluable.

Ian and David Tivey for the bike conversion, tel: 0151 280 3308.

Steve, my mate for the Candy Apple Red paint job.

G&R Fabrications, Graham Lee and the rest of the guys; also David Barlow for the handbrake, handle bar and dust cover, tel: 0161 797 5467.

A&S Motorcycles, Andy for the chrome fender, rear lights, tel: 01204 397625.

Oldham Motorcycles, Steve and Ogril for seat re-upholstery, parts and advice, tel: 0161 628 8424.

Also the many other bikers for their help and encouragement.

Thanks to you all - Respect!

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