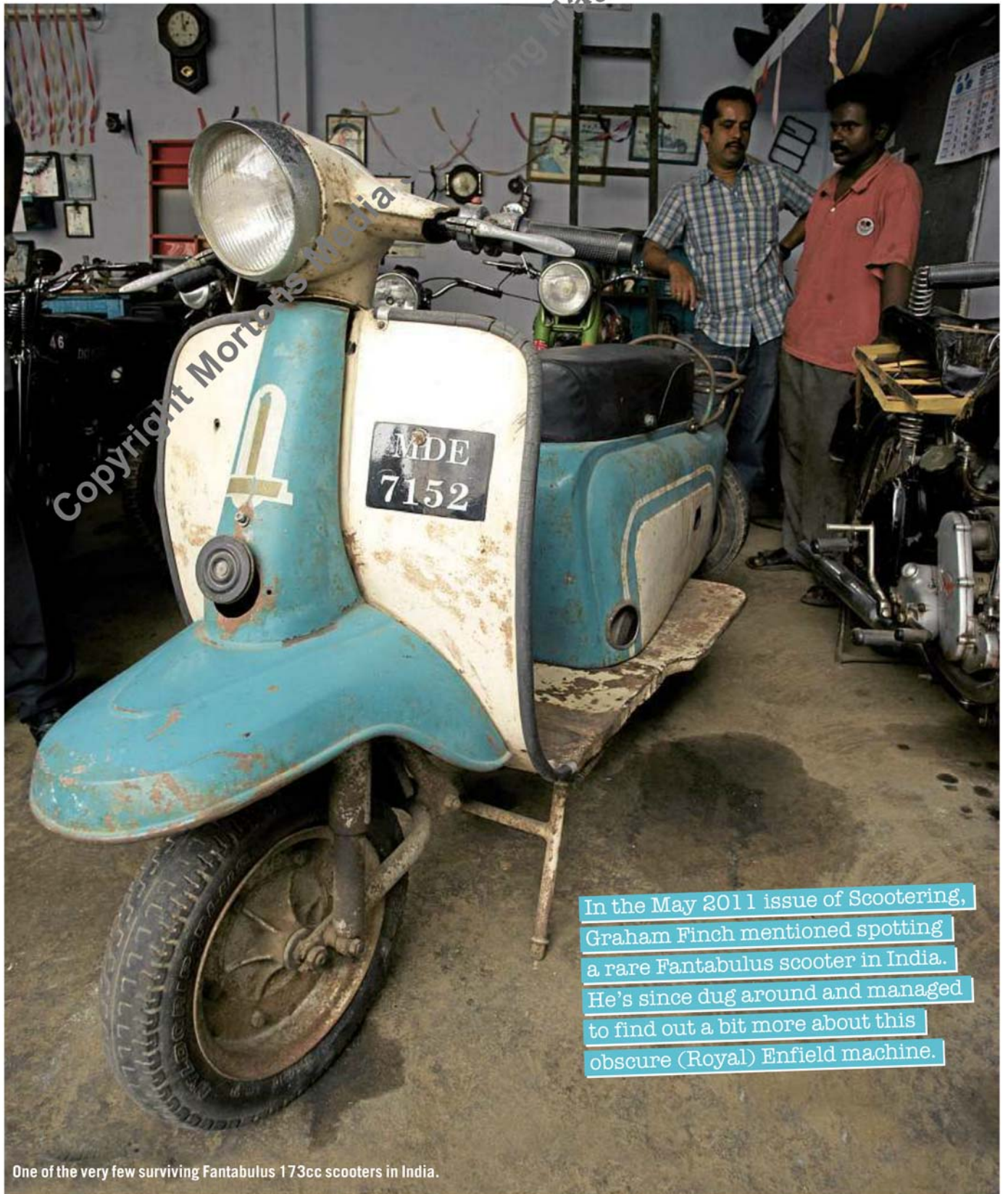


Enfield's forgotten Fantabulus



In the May 2011 issue of Scootering, Graham Finch mentioned spotting a rare Fantabulus scooter in India. He's since dug around and managed to find out a bit more about this obscure (Royal) Enfield machine.

One of the very few surviving Fantabulus 173cc scooters in India.



Muthu in his workshop in Coimbatore with his rare Fantabulus.

Quirky looking and harder to find than a proverbial four-leaf clover, the Fantabulus was barely in production for a decade. In fact this early 1960s scooter is so rare there's very little information available about it. However, with the help of the owner – Muthu Kumar Kanakachalam – of the one I luckily chanced upon in the southern Indian city of Coimbatore earlier this year, it's been possible to piece together some of its forgotten history.

British beginnings

Many of you will have no doubt heard of the Royal Enfield marque. Well, despite never being available on UK shores, the Indian-made Fantabulus has a direct connection to the venerable British motorbike maker, a company which started up back in 1890. Royal Enfield was the name under which the Enfield Cycle Company made motorcycles, bicycles and lawnmowers among other things.

Based in Redditch, Worcestershire, Royal Enfield began exporting its fully assembled Bullet motorbikes to India after the Second World War and also secured a massive order from the Indian Government which was looking for a suitable motorcycle for its police and army to use. The Bullet was chosen as the most suitable bike for the job. In the mid-1950s the Redditch company partnered with Madras Motors in India to form Enfield India to assemble, under licence, the Royal Enfield Bullet motorcycle in Madras (now called Chennai).

The first machines were assembled entirely from components shipped from England but by 1962 all components were made in India.

An independent manufacturer since the demise of Royal Enfield in England in the early 1970s, in the 1990s Enfield India acquired the rights to the name Royal Enfield. Royal Enfield now claims to be the oldest motorcycle brand in the world still in production, with Royal Enfield of India now selling motorcycles worldwide.

The electric Sixties

It was perhaps as early as 1960 that the Fantabulus was unveiled to an unsuspecting Indian public. Somewhat ahead of its time – I had originally assumed it was an early 1970s creation – it is thought that the futuristic-looking scooter was designed in Redditch rather than India. Whatever the truth may be, the 173cc Villiers two-stroke engine, together with its Siba-Dyna electric starter and four-speed gearbox were made in England and shipped over to India, where the rest of the scooter was produced, for final assembly.

The wonderful name Fantabulus (without an 'o') is painted down the side and the spare wheel is fixed vertically – below a steel rack – on the back, like you see on Jeeps. The rack itself is a rudimentary thing and its design is something that likely changed over the years. Flat footrests, which extend down each side like the running boards on an old jalopy, add a couple of inches to its width.

Unlike most other scooters of the period, there are no removable side-panels here and access to the spark plug and carburettor is from an opening under the seat, with the hinge running right down one side, as opposed to the end. There's a pair of 50mm round holes on the body's sides to allow in air to cool the engine.

As with most other makes of scooter back then, the Enfield Fantabulus didn't have any



The original paintwork is in fairly good condition and owner Muthu is pondering exactly how renovation should proceed.



Miller headlight, one of numerous parts exported from the UK.



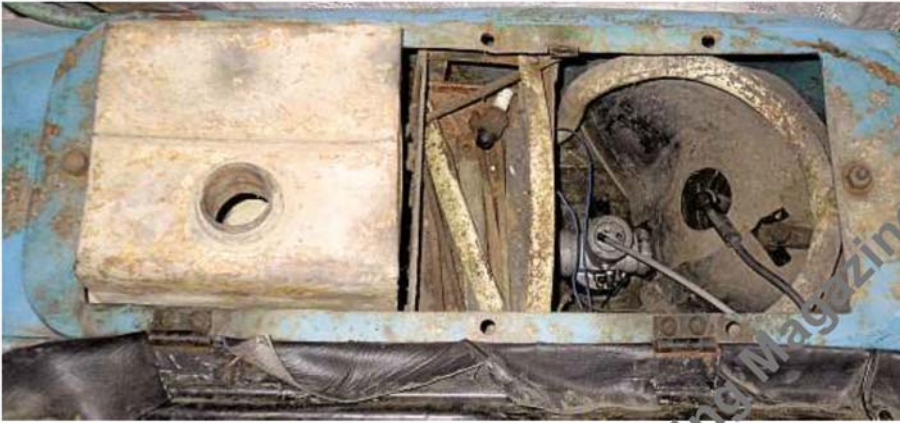
Simply fantabulus – without the 'o'.



Adjacent to the left grip is the red electric starter button and the black headlamp switch.



The pedal on the left is the rear brake, while the two on the right are for going through the gears, with the toe changing to first while the heel does the others.



The seat is hinged along one side, giving access to the spark plug and petrol tank, which is the pale-coloured box on the left.



The reflectors have a 1960s look, akin to a Ford Anglia. On later models, one more was added to the centre.

indicators. The 36W headlamp is a Miller, while the rear finned reflectors – not lights – have a distinct 1960s space-age look, being extensions of the one-piece bodywork and slightly reminiscent of those seen on a Ford Anglia car. On later models, a third finned reflector was added to the top-centre. The tail-light is fitted in the centre of the spare wheel mount and has a double filament bulb, meaning it also acts as brake light. It's another UK import – Lucas – and was the same as fitted to the Bullet.

However, what made the Fantabulus scooter different was the Siba-Dynastart electric ignition system. The Siba kit is a DC-output generator with four sets of brushes. Basically, these brushes pick up current used to create a spark needed for ignition and a small red button mounted near the left grip activated this starter. However, the brushes

needed to be kept clean to work and this meant maintenance had to be done regularly. This servicing was a bit fiddly and required a special tool, so consequently it was something that got neglected, resulting in a conked-out Fantabulus. Unsurprisingly, at some point around 1967, a kick-start was added. Nevertheless, a scooter with electric start was not that common back in the 1960s anywhere in the world, and certainly not in India.

Fancy features

As with many British scooters that also used a Villiers engine, instead of having a twist-grip changer, the Enfield's gears are shifted via foot-operated pedals similar in principle to those on a motorbike. Arranged opposite to what many of us know with Lambrettas and Vespas, and indeed the set up of modern day motorcycles, the gears are on the right and a left-foot pedal

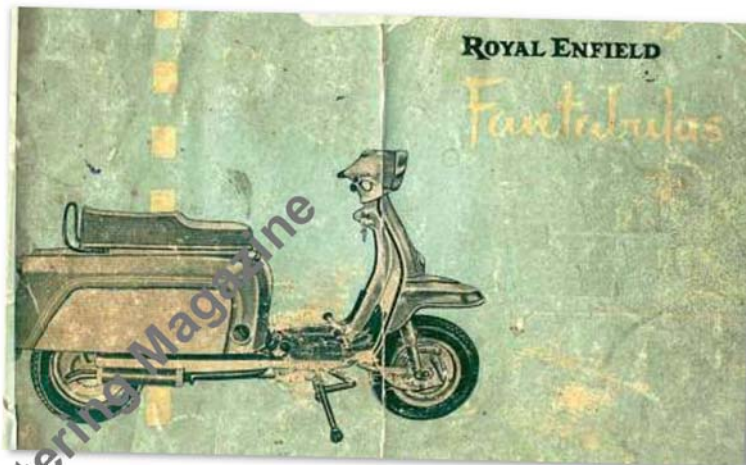
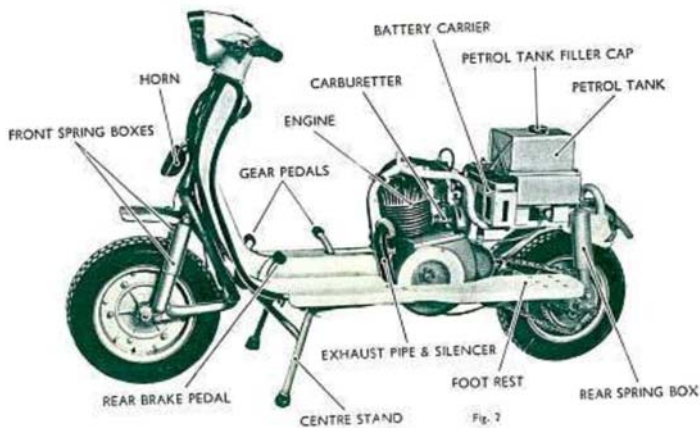
works the rear brake. Another motorbike feature was the rear swingarm with large hydraulic dampers as suspension, which led Indians to say: 'Fantabulus: a bike in a scooter's clothing'. At the front is an Earles forks design with leading links and hydraulic dampers.

The simple dash includes a circular Wipac rotary switch with five settings: 'PK' for parking; 'Off'; 'IG & CH' for ignition and charging; 'H' for all lights including the speedo and 'L' for all lighting except the headlight.

Full- and low-beam of the headlamp is activated by a black thumb switch adjacent to the left grip, while the dash also includes an ignition lamp, steering lock and a pull-knob for the choke. For reasons that remain a mystery, this choke knob was moved up to the dash on the later 1960s models – on the earlier Fantabulus it was located on the front of the main body.



Production started around 1960. This model is from 1962.



An original diagram of the bare Fantabulus indicating its main parts.

1960s Indian literature, interesting that it states 'Royal Enfield' and not 'Enfield India'. Maybe there were plans to bring it to the UK after all?

1962 and all that

Just as Enfield was doing well in India and generally scooters were selling like proverbial hot cakes, Royal Enfield in England was struggling and by the end of the 1960s it was basically toast. Perhaps the Fantabulus would have been launched on the British and European markets had Royal Enfield not gone belly-up.

But while it discreetly bore the company's name – along with the scoot's serial number – on a dinky plate below the dash, the 173cc Fantabulus did suffer a few problems unknown to the ever-reliable Royal Enfield motorbikes. Some owners complained the electric Dynastart didn't work after a while (if not expertly serviced) and that the carburetor regularly flooded. Apparently, it wasn't unusual to see people pushing a Fantabulus along the road to get the engine started!

Production of the Fantabulus lasted for about a decade, but it's not known how many were made. Sales, however, were probably quite modest because the scoot was deemed ahead of its time, principally due to its electric starter, plus the fact that Vespa had already got a secure foothold in the Indian market.

Muthu's Fantabulus has no storage space; no glovebox, underseat compartment or side-panel storage box, meaning there was nowhere to stuff a few bits and bobs. On later models, apparently, a glovebox was added.



The choke button on Muthu's 1962 scoot is near the seat, but later models had it on the dash.

Another issue was the wheelbase, as the 10in front and rear wheels were further apart than most scooters, which meant it wasn't as easy to manoeuvre as the ever-popular Vespas and Lambrettas that are still seen flying around the country.

Rescue me

Muthu luckily found his 1962 scooter in remarkably good condition. The original blue paintwork, albeit rusty in places, is still intact. The main parts are all there and the bodywork is undamaged. He's about to start renovating it, but is unsure about whether to repaint it or leave it as is.

The stylish Fantabulus logo subtly emblazoned down each side panel could be redone, but it'd be hard to get this looking exactly right and the actual paint finish – gloss or whatever – is something that is hard to decide upon. Whatever sheen there originally was has now completely gone.

Although Enfield is still producing motorbikes in India, the company has undergone a change in ownership and the new guys don't seem to be interested in this relic from the company's past, irrespective of how it uniquely features in Enfield's rich history. Muthu is on his own, but hopefully we'll see some photos here of it done up to its former glory in the not-too-distant future. **SC**

Graham Finch



FABULOUS

Thanks to the interweb, some books about Royal Enfield and old copies of *The Motor Cycle* found in the Mortons archive, we can add a little to the Fantabulus story. Fast forward 20 years and Enfield India introduces the Fantabulus (fantastic performance, fabulous price maybe?) in 1962.

According to said research, George Neal designed a scooter for Royal Enfield in the early 1940s, along the lines of the European Vespa and Lambretta scooters, but the factory did not pursue the project. Typical of pretty much all of the British motorcycle manufacturers of the time. There is also reference to a collaboration between Enfield and the Spencer-Moulton rubber company (Alex Moulton invented the Hydralastic suspension as seen on the Mini car) on a unique suspension unit for a scooter, although this could well have been the same project.

When the Fantabulus arrived in the 1960s it had a British made 174cc Villiers two-stroke engine fitted, boasted 7.4hp engine and could allegedly reach 60mph. The rear wheel was chain driven, the manual says that fuel consumption was 38.5km/litre and the fuel tank had a capacity of 8 litres with another 1 litre in reserve.

The Enfield India-built Fantabulus apparently featured on Royal Enfield's stand at the 1968 Earls Court Motorcycle show in London alongside British-built Royal Enfield motorcycles. Reports suggest the scooter still had the electric start fitted to the engine and was to be sold for £175. Further research has failed to come up with any evidence that it did make it into British showrooms. It is however interesting to see that as the company was apparently on a downward slide, Royal Enfield reached out to Enfield India for help.

Andy