

Newsfront

MADE LIKE A GUN, GOES LIKE A BULLET



Bullet Classic

It's the old motorcycle that never entirely went away. And now it's back in Canada in time for the summer.

What's old is new again. Royal Enfield appears on the Canadian motorcycle scene in time for the 2010 riding season. Unlike recent revivals from the likes of Indian and Norton, Royal Enfield motorcycles have never stopped being built, but you would be forgiven if, in the presence of one, you thought that they'd never in their history evolved.

We first met Rob McMullen at December's Toronto motorcycle show. His body language was that of a person carried through an ordeal by adrenaline. As anyone who has ever worked at a trade show knows, manning a booth is extremely fatiguing. But for McMullen the job was made more arduous as he faced the enormous task of seeing an upstart company through the Canadian motorcycle show season. "Everything has been going relatively smoothly," he said. "Our biggest hurdle so far has been getting everything organized in time for the shows since we had less than two months to prepare."

Royal Enfield is imported and distributed in Canada by Origin Motorcycles, a

partnership formed between Edmontonians McMullen and Brett Morgan in October 2009. In an auspicious happenstance, the motorcycle enthusiasts went looking to secure the Canadian rights to Royal Enfield at the same time that the manufacturer was looking for a Canadian distributor. "After spending a few years in Asia," says McMullen, "I noticed that the Canadian motorcycle industry was missing smaller, classically styled, and affordable motorcycles. I believed Enfield could fill this gap in the market and thought it represented a great opportunity. Within two weeks of receiving our business plan, Royal Enfield invited us to visit their manufacturing plant and sign a letter of intent."

First year plans include the establishment of a 15- to 20-dealer Canadian network. Origin is looking at established dealers in major cities capable of good service standards. "We're just finalizing the signing of dealers



Bullet Electra Vintage

throughout Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. The rest of the provinces will follow this spring. Every dealer will carry an essential parts list that the manufacturer has put together, and if there's something they don't have, it'll be in our Edmonton warehouse or shipped up from the U.S.," says McMullen.

The deal struck with Origin isn't Royal Enfield's first Canadian venture. A brief undertaking in the mid '90s failed when distributor problems and the poor quality of the bikes stalled national expansion—disgruntled former Enfield owners recall numerous issues with the machines. Cognizant of its tainted history, Origin is facing this hurdle head-on. "The differences between the older models and the ones we distribute are like night and day," says McMullen. "Royal Enfield has, within the last two years, come out with full unit construction engines to replace the old semi-unit-construction engines. This has eliminated reliability issues. Every model sold in Canada is fuel-injected, electric start, and has upgraded wiring. Nothing is the same as the old models except styling."

The Royal Enfield line-up for Canada consists of four Bullet models, each priced well under \$8,000. Introduced in 1948, the Bullet has the distinction of being the longest

continually-produced motorcycle model in the world, so it is appropriate that the model range is vintage in appearance with a livery that mimics the look of 1950s machines. The Royal Enfield name has also managed to stand the test of time; although the British company created in 1893 was defunct by 1971, assembly, and then later full production, was shifted to India and has been ongoing since 1955, making it the oldest surviving motorcycle manufacturer in the world.

Enfield describes the Bullet Electra (\$6,895) and Electra Deluxe (\$6,995) as modern-day interpretations of a 1955 model. Sharing the same all-metal bodywork, the Deluxe is notable for its chrome hand-painted tank, rubber kneepads, and chromed fenders.

The Bullet Classic (\$7,395) digs even deeper into Enfield's gene pool with its hooded headlight, pea-shooter exhaust, and solo spring-suspended seat. Since Enfield's establishment in India was the result of the large number of Bullets built for the Indian

police and military, it's fitting that the Bullet Classic Military (\$7,495) is painted flat olive-green.

Origin tells us that this line-up will be bolstered in the spring by the arrival of Café Racer and Vintage kits. Also of interest, at least to the three-wheel fan(s) in our office, is that a sidecar is available as an option and fits all models.

Common to every Bullet is a British-designed, air-cooled, 499 cc single-cylinder engine claiming 27.2 (every tenth counts!) horsepower and 30.5 lb-ft of torque. The transmission is five-speed. Enfield calls it an "environmentally responsible and economical choice for urban commuting," and claims fuel consumption of 2.77 L/100 km (85 mpg).

The first container was shipped mid-February and the first Bullets should be available at dealerships late March. Pre-orders on its website (enfieldmotorcycles.ca) will be filled at the nearest dealership. Enfields are covered by a two-year, 10,000 kilometre manufacturer's warranty.



Paint it Black

If the grim reaper rode a motorcycle, he'd ride Harley-Davidson's Custom Vehicle Operations 2010 Ultra Classic Electra Glide—that is if he had the patience to say the entire name. At 1,803 cc it's got the biggest engine Harley makes, and though they're hush-hush about horsepower, torque is a claimed 115 lb-ft at a just-off-idle 3,750 rpm. Designers fitted more than 185 blacked-out bits to the bike, including mirrors, saddlebag guards and diamond black gauge faces. Complementing the black and slate paint are chrome roulette wheels and a low profile smoked windshield.

Although the Electra Glide's exterior is sombre, it's really a pampering home fit for a candy-ass. A heated leather seat toasts the extremities while heated grips keep the digits warm so that they can manipulate the 160-watt Harman-Kardon audio system and handlebar-mounted Garmin Zumo 660 GPS navigator. Cruise control saves the wrists from fatigue and other niceties include ABS brakes, LED saddlebag lights, and a CB and intercom system.

Only 999 examples of the numbered and badged bike will be made. (To put Harley's idea of "limited edition" into perspective, that's more than Harley's up-for-sale MV Augusta brand sold in the U.S. last year.) At a knee-buckling \$43,359, more than just your aesthetic sensibilities will need to be in the black if you want to park one in your garage.

Call your dealer



This month we chat with Angela McGirr, co-owner of Mission Cycle in Angus, a small community located in Southern Ontario.

Have long have you been in business?

"For 10 years. There are five of us on staff. It started off with Todd, my husband, and his passion for motorcycles. He found from working as a mechanic at other dealerships that customer service was always lacking. Mission Cycle is about offering something different, about providing a more personal experience for customers. A lot of people come here just to chat, but we're not afraid to say we have to get back to work if we're busy—we always tell it like it is."

What do you sell?

"We started with Honda. Todd is a firm believer in the brand, but two years later, when KTM was looking to add a local dealer, we took them on because of our passion for off-road riding."

Isn't it a volatile situation to be an independent Honda dealer these days?

"You mean because of the Powerhouse thing? [laughing] There's a Powerhouse dealer in Barrie, just 20 minutes down the road. We think it sucks that Honda are closing down small dealerships, and of course we're worried about it because you just never know. We've heard from customers who >>>



Funky Cold Medina

From Polaris headquarters in Medina, Minnesota, came news of a Victory Vegas so exclusive that only 100 were to be built. Potential buyers had a three-week period ending Feb. 15 in which to place an order, with delivery scheduled for March. Victory describes the Vegas LE as the quickest, leanest, and meanest model they've ever built. When asked about the impetus behind the mad dash project, Victory product manager Gary Gray revealed an unlikely inspiration for a company that specializes in cruisers. "We wanted to honour racers Gregor Moe, Laura Klock, and Matt Waring, who brought Victory motorcycles to the Bonnevillie Salt Flats. We started with our lightest bike and our largest, most powerful engine, and added a limited edition paint scheme—plus we've priced it aggressively."

Lightweight only by heavyweight American standards, the 293 kg (645 lb) bike has a 1,731 cc mill and is built with Victory's stage 2 performance cams. Claimed horsepower is 97 with 113 lb-ft of torque. The transmission has six forward speeds. For \$17,839 buyers had the choice of four colour schemes, with a number plate painted on the flanks proven in testing to reduce drag and boost velocity. Although not mounted for the publicity images, the Vegas LE includes a passenger seat and pegs—for those who don't have the autonomy to make purchases on their own and who must placate their partners.



Call your dealer

>>> have been to Powerhouse dealers that they didn't like walking into sterile showrooms and having to deal with car salesmen in suits. I know our customers don't want to buy a dirt bike from a guy in a suit."

As a rural dealer, are dirt bikes your biggest sellers?

"In previous years it's actually been street bikes, but last year it was off-road. The economy changed things; the person that normally would buy a street bike has other concerns and responsibilities than the off-road buyer. The off-road guys tend to be younger and still living at home."

What is your own preference? On road or off?

"This time of year I'm riding on the ice every weekend on a KTM 450 SX-F. In the summer I'm either on something like a Honda Shadow or a CBR600RR—unless of course it's an off-road day, then I take a 150 SX because I'm short."

That's a surprisingly diverse range. What if you could only pick one to ride?

"I'd have to go with the 450 on ice because it's such a rush. The traction is incredible and it's the only time that I feel competitive. It's also safer; there's only a few other people out there and there aren't any idiots in cars."

Since you're located at the gates of Canadian Forces Base Borden, do you get a lot of business from military personnel?

"Absolutely. They're mostly transients because it's a training base. There's always new faces walking in off the base and they're mostly interested in buying off-road machines because they have their own trail system."

Do any of them talk about aliens, captured UFOs or secret military projects?

"Negative. If only we were so lucky. We

mostly just hear complaints about how the fuel tanks on aircraft are too small."

For flight range?

"No. For cleaning. Apparently they have to crawl inside them; one trainer told us a heavyset guy actually got stuck in the opening while trying to crawl in."

Is there anything you would like to change about the Canadian motorcycle industry?

"Lots! Graduated licensing should be introduced, insurance needs to be more affordable, and everyone should be required to take a riding course. [She pauses, then laughs]. Well, maybe not everyone. I never took a course."

What about Canadian riders? Do you see a need for them to change?

"Well, they're either too informed or too misinformed because of what they've read on the Internet. Guys come in here telling us what to do because of advice they received in a forum. Of course the guy giving the advice has no experience in the industry yet he's considered to be an expert."

"Also, everyone's always looking for a deal—not that there's anything necessarily wrong with that—but I don't go to the beer store and then ask the guy at the register for a better price on a case. People don't realize that the motorcycle industry works on much lower mark-ups than other industries."

Do you enjoy your work?

"I do, a lot. You get to meet many interesting people. The business is our kid and it's been great to see it grow over the years, to learn from our struggles, and meet the challenges. With the exception of Honda Powerhouse dealers, we have good relations with other dealers, too; it's an integral part of our business to get along in the dealership community and it allows us to find and trade for that elusive bike so that we can make our customer happy."

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