



WE'RE ALL HERE BECAUSE WE'RE NOT ALL THERE



# Norton Colorado

[www.nortoncolorado.org](http://www.nortoncolorado.org)

Newsletter

July/August 2025



Jack "Pig"  
Abeyta  
meets  
Jack the  
Pig

## Upcoming Events

*2025 Calendar See Page 14*

August 3, 2025 (Sunday), BBQ and open garage hosted Jamie & Michelle Jones.

September 7, 2025, Sunday, Old Bike Ride.

Look for club emails or check the website for more details about these gatherings.

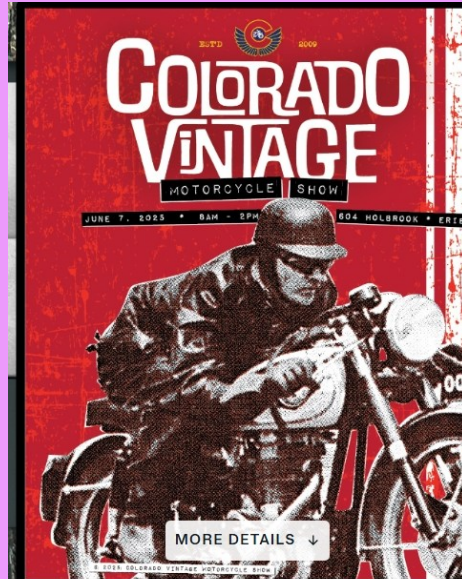


## Big Tent BBQ hosted by Eric Bergman and Susie Saarinen

Another fine time at the yearly Big Tent BBQ hosted by Eric and Susie. This year's highlight was eating Jack the Roasted Pig in honor of Jack "Pig" Abeyta's 80th birthday. Thanks to Eric and Susie and everyone else who turned out to make this a fun day.













# 20th Annual Blue Sky Ride and Brunch

Hosted by Dave Sheesley and Matt And Mariah Norman

Another fun ride and wonderful Brunch. Thanks to Dave, Mariah and Matt for putting this all together again. I had a great time and will see you again next year,





## Morrie's Place

[www.morriesplacecycle.com](http://www.morriesplacecycle.com)

A few years ago, Matt Reynolds told me about this amazing British/Vintage bike shop. He said if I was ever in the neighborhood I should check it out. Well, riding from Indianapolis to Madison, WI put me "in the neighborhood". Wow!! What a shop.

Morrie's has been around since the 1950's. Check out the website for the history and more information. Morrie's is a full service shop. Ed Zender, the owner, does it all from minor repairs to full rebuilds. There are many bikes for sale and he has over 16,000 part numbers available. He has been buying up other shops inventories and has used and new parts. If you need it he can do it.



Ed Zender, Owner



**Morrie's Place**

[www.morriesplacecycle.com](http://www.morriesplacecycle.com)

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- Full Machine Shop
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5410 Austin Court  
Ringwood, Illinois 60072

■ [morriesplc@aol.com](mailto:morriesplc@aol.com)

Ed Zender  
815.653.7000

**Norton** **TRIUMPH** **BSA**





## Rose Farm Classics

<http://www.rosefarmclassics.com>

Behind Morris Place is a small shop where Jim Barron works his magic. He is not open to the public and particular which projects he takes on. Jim works on European and vintage bikes. He builds race bikes from scratch, fabricating many of the parts he needs. The project that most impressed me was a 1924 Ace that he wants to get to a record breaking 135 mph.





# FEATHERBEDS Forever

Inspired by his racing heroes, Colin Leighfield bought his first Norton Dominator before he turned 18. He remains a featherbed fan to this day...

Photos by Colin Leighfield, Mortons Archive, RC Archive

PART THE FIRST



11 June 2025

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## NORTON DOMINATORS

It's easy to easily defend the make and model of bikes that we cut our teeth on. We might also disagree the other side that we fell into the weeds. In truth, whether single or mostly vertical twin, there wasn't much difference between the popular fare from British manufacturers.

Norton, for example, continuously developed their heavyweight twins right through to the Norton Commandos. The changes represented incremental increases in size and progressive improvement from Bert Hopwood's original Model 7 design. Hopwood also designed the BSA A7 and A10; much the same as a Dominator, but with the carburettor at the back instead of the front and down by gear instead of chain. 'Blue' you could almost say different versions of the same engine. Well, almost. Edward Turner's Triumph twin had two carburettors, one at the front and one at the back, but it was still much the same.

Doug Fine significantly influenced the development and race successes of the 55 versions of the Dominator. He had a similar influence on Triumph after moving there when Norton relocated from Banbury to Luton. The amazing 100mph TT lap of 1961 achieved by a Dominator 500 was a few years later by Peter Taylor, whizzing around on the brilliant works 500. Triumph. Both bikes were Doug's babies, with just years in between them.

Neither should we forget AMC, Ariel, Royal Enfield, or the Vincent singles, one of which I owned. The same ingredients tossed up into the air, and coming back down in slightly different ways.

The unit construction Triumph and BSA vertical twins were really no great leap forward just the same approach to engine design with the gearbox fixed in a unit construction casting format. Hardly rocket science. Norton's United Twin was much the same, although its abandonment due mostly to cooling issues meant that no unit construction heavyweight Norton twin ever went into production.

I'm as bad as the rest of them in hailing up my Norton - yes to 1961 was offered a very nice 1961 Bonneville for £100. If it had the money then I would have been an avid Triumph man, and the rest would have been rubbish from today's perspective. I don't mind. Now of course we're all well, all accurate in our beliefs of our personal experience. Now it is obvious that these machines were detached from each other.

JUNE 2025 17



Vic Willeughby and friend put an early Dominor 88 through its paces



As a teenager, Colin was inspired by the exploits of Phil Read (on the left) who rode the 650SS tuned by Syd Lawton (standing next to Read) to victory at Thruxton

other. They were all pieces in a jigsaw which is now a beautiful picture, one that we all gaze on with great nostalgia, realising that it was just a brief moment in a probably unique time. How lucky we were. Certainly, British bikes have been a massive influence in my life, and still are to this day.

My first Norton was the 1960 Jubilee that I acquired to replace my 1956 Ariel Cub shortly after my 17th birthday. The Jubilee was quite sick and I didn't have the experience to sort it. I also owned a 1955 Vincent M55, very good but one of the few finished in an awful Aubergine colour and looked a bit tatty. An insult to my vanity!

Around then I was introduced to the great Bob Collier who had a treasure house of Norton bikes and engines, as well as some unique development prototype parts that came from the clearing out process as Banbury Street was shut down. These included the excellent 250 high-camshaft single prototype, the seductive Dominator prototype for the M40, the United Twin, and unmarked castings for spayed inlet port versions of the Navigator cylinder heads, intended for twin carburettors, much like a Bonneville. Clearly, Norton had significant plans to advance the lightweight twin design.

At the time, I was earning about £4 a week and had an outstanding debt on the Jubilee. Among Bob's collection was a red 1959 Dominator 99, the last year of the widebody featherbed twins. A pal had got a new 1964 AJS 31 CSR Hurricane, the later and best version with Norton forks and brakes, lower subframe and seat and other improvements. I had been fortunate enough to ride it and was literally blown away. Fast, smooth and great handling. What is more, he was a particularly

good rider. On that bike, no one ever seemed to be able to catch him, whatever they were riding. There was no way that I could afford anything like that, but the Dominator might get me close. Could I find a way?

'Yes! Don't ask me how, but Bob finished up with the Jubilee and M55 and I got the 99. Was I happy? The Dominator had sidecar fittings on it, quickly removed, but the steering head angle and gear ratios had been left alone. Bob fitted it with new piston rings and, to avoid replacing one battered silencer, made an excellent set of slamed pipes, cut and welded-up from the original twin exhausts. The back tyre was beyond redemption, but he had an Avon race tyre lying around, so he fitted that. Admittedly, it was bald in the centre, but as it looked all right for when the bike was laid over, I thought it would be OK. Off I went.

Within an hour I had the 99 up to over 90mph and went home well pleased. It seemed to get valve bounce in third gear much earlier than I had expected worry about that later. The following day, I rode it to work in Birmingham, where it was pleasantly discoloured in the traffic. All day, I could think about was my bike. As soon as work ended, I was away. The roads were dirty after earlier rain. Stationary in traffic, when the car started to move, I opened the throttle and operated the clutch. The bike slid sideways and fell off at 200mph, feeling very stupid. A bald Avon racing tyre on a wet road was clearly not a good idea and the first thing I did was to change that.

The 99 was a pleasure to ride, very smooth and quick. I was fascinated by the 'on rail' feeling in corners. It almost seemed to steer itself with no input from me. The

brakes were more than good enough and it could certainly keep up with the standard 650s such as the A10 and Thunderbird in a straight line. My mate's T110 had the edge, but not by much.

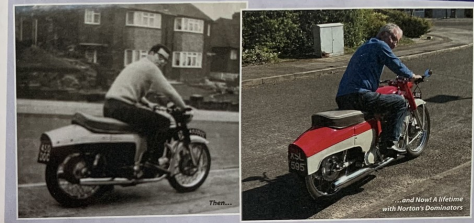
Shortly after, I took off the head and found the early valve bounce was caused by two broken valve springs. This gave me the opportunity to replace all four, grind the ports. The 99 even better and it became clear that early versions of the 88 and 99 thrived with slamed pipes, as well as sounding very good. The 55 versions of both 500 and 600 Dominators had these fitted as standard. They only disappeared when the downdraught head versions of the 88 and 600SS came along and the 99 was dropped from the range.

Back then I was riding the bike to work every day, about 14 miles, and riding with

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11 JUNE 2025

## NOW AND THEN



the café racer bunch at evenings and weekends. I fondly remember arriving at various coffee bars, with Rag Doll by the Four Seasons playing on the jukebox. I still love that record. Long rides and race meetings to Brenda Hatch were par for the day. The 99 was quite fast enough to keep me up with the front runners.

Another member of my riding group had an 88SS. It was one of the 1961 type, in Forest Green and Dove Grey, pre-downdraught head with twin carburettors, Siamese pipes and the cigar-shaped silencer. It was

astoundingly quick and stayed easily with the 650s, sounding wonderful as well. That was the model tested by Bruce Main-Smith, recording a mean top speed of 108mph with a best one-way of 111mph. Those figures were only slightly slower than the 650SS BMS tested a year later at MIRA, which showed a mean of 111mph and best one-way of 111mph. That made a big impression.

I have only ridden one 88, when I swapped bikes with a chap on the Isle of Man. I was impressed by how smooth and

of speed and acceleration. I could see the attraction in an 88. One day at work, I was asked to take an urgent small item to Stoke on Trent. That gave me the opportunity to sustain an indicated 90 for about thirty miles - until I suddenly felt the engine start to tighten. I pulled the clutch in, stopped and turned it off and then let it cool for a while before restarting, when it ran normally. I rode it a bit more gingerly until I got home.

I found that the 117/167 376 carburettor was fitted with a 250 main jet. Although that was the described correct size in the



Stunning factory shot of a new Dominator 99. This image was used in several Norton ads of the time...

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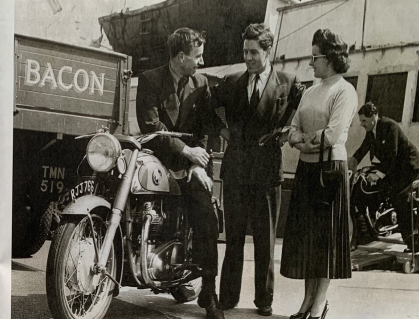
JUNE 2025 19

## CATALOGUE COUNTRY



10 JUNE 2025

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Another pair of Norton's famous racers, John Surtees poses on a widebody Norton alongside Geoff Duke on the Isle of Man in 1955

manual. I also read that for 'sustained high speed, a main jet and/or two sizes higher should be fitted' (promptly fitted a 270, as I have ever since on both 99s and 650SS). I have never ridden with that carburettor single or twin.

Despite sustained very high speeds over long distances on motorcycles, I never experienced that tightening again.

As summer 1964 appeared, I took a touring holiday on the Dominator. The new center took a small suitcase, tent, bungee on top and, with a pair of my army kitbags in panniers, I was in business. My school pal Dave came on the back. The year before I'd accidentally ridden my Ariel Cub around Somerset. Barmouth and Penryn with me girlfriend (now wife) Pat. By contrast, the Dominator holiday should be a doddle...

In those days, that kind of holiday would cost in total about £15, although that was a lot of money then. The M4 was quite new, had a trouble-free run, camping overnight and heading for Torquay. The weather was great. We were enjoying ourselves between

the beach and local pubs, then moved off again three or four days later. That continued all the way to Land's End, which really did seem to be close to the end of the world. Quite an adventure.

All that time, the 99 ran well. Cruising as fast as you could on those roads and not needing too many petrol stops with fuel economy over 60mpg. We spent a few more days exploring, had a go at surfing in Sennen Cove on boards that were moulded from plywood. Wonderful nights beneath the stars, listening to The Beatles on a portable record player. A Norton Dominator and The Beatles: what a heavenly combination!

We set off north, in one single day, we reached the Bristol Channel and crossed into south Wales on the Aust Ferry. No Seven Bridges in those days! We arrived in Barmouth around bedtime: quite a feat. It's 350 or more miles, and none of it was motorway. We did rather well for kids who hadn't yet turned 18.

During that stage of the journey I first heard an intermittent rattle from the engine. The 99's



performance seemed to be unaffected and I couldn't find any obvious cause. Eventually, the holiday came to an end and we headed home. The Dominator had performed faultlessly, starting reliably every time.

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JUNE 2025 111



## SUPER SPORTS



In the end, Colin did buy his 650SS. An ambition achieved

and only needed the drive chain adjusting. However... there was that rattle, and once or twice I had felt the back end squirm in corners. Featherbed Nortons don't do that, even fully-loaded, two-up. At that stage, there were about 44,000 miles on the clock.

The first job was to lift the head and barrel. To my sorrow I found that a piston ring circlip in the nearside cylinder was floating loose in the gouge caused by the gudgeon pin as it thrust sideways in the bore. There was no choice but to get the barrel in for a reline, pronto. Next I found play in the swinging arm. The Silentbloc bush was in a state of collapse, probably not helped by previously pulling a sidcar for I don't know how many miles. Replacing that was a specialist job, so I sent it off, trying to work out how to afford all of this.

I went to see Bob Collier about the piston problem and he found me a brand new pair of Wellworthy, solid skirt Nomad pistons, standard size. The standard compression ratio on the pre-1960 Dominator 99 was 7.4:1. The Nomad's increased that to 9.1:1. I soon had the bike back together, with the re-bushed swinging arm fitted. It ran well immediately. After careful running in, the performance boost was obvious. My pal's T110 was no longer faster in a straight line. It doesn't take a lot to make a 99 go quickly!

So what do I think of the wide-line Dominators? What about the width? Many say that they find it too wide across the tank to be comfortable, or hard to get their feet on the floor. I am about 5'8" and could always

get my feet flat on the floor. I tend to set the footrests high and perhaps that helped, but I found the broad, shaped seat to be very supportive and comfortable on a long distance ride.

The width between your knees is influenced by the width lower down, across the gearbox and clutch. When I first sat on a modern 961 Norton Commando, I was struck by how pointless the beautifully sculptured tank was when my feet were so much further apart on the footrests. The only way I could get my knees close to the tank was by forcing them into an unsustainable knock-kneed position. There's something daft about all of this. Even on my current Triumph Speed Twin 900, my knees are a couple of inches away from the tank. It seems increasingly common to narrow seats down, to compensate for raised seat heights. Sorry, but a narrow seat isn't as comfortable as a wider one, particularly when you are sat on it all day.

I can understand that some people find a wide-line featherbed to be too wide, but I never found it to be a problem. The 99 handled well, had good brakes and a smooth engine with performance just as good as any other standard 650. It was very easy to make the 99 go faster and it without much vibration, and wasn't heavy on fuel. With the standard Lucas coil ignition and an 1802 distributor, mine was always an easy starter. Despite hard use, it was reliable.

Into 1965 when I started hankering after a 650SS, I'd seen them on the road in capable hands, particularly remembering Tom

Loughridge, and they seemed faster than anything. I loved the lean, compact look of the slimline Dominators. The black and silver finish with chrome mudguards and chaincases just looked like class to me back then. It still does. In the right hands, these machines were production race winners. The Syd Lawton-prepared SS won the Thruxton 500 miler in 1962, 1963 and 1964. Norman Overend consistently won the 750 production class races at Darley Moor on a very standard-looking 1962 650SS, well into the 1970s.

I could just about stretch to a HP deal to buy a secondhand 650SS. I did a deal with Motor Sales in Birmingham and part-exchanged the 99 for a 1962 650SS. It was in decent condition except for some dulling of the chrome on the front mudguard, but at £200 it was the best I could do. They told me they had fitted new clutch plates and silencers.

When I rode it home, the surging acceleration was very obvious. I had arrived! That evening I was out with my pals - showing off - when the clutch began to slip. It got worse to the point that there was no drive. I had a precarious, ignominious tow home from a mate on his bike.

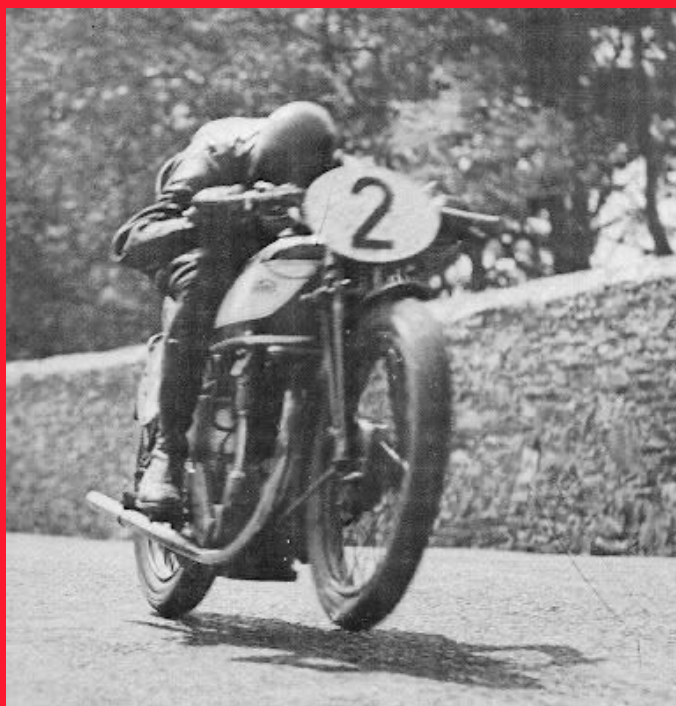
When I got the primary chaincase off, I found out that the clutch centre nut hadn't been tightened and the clutch had, in effect, fallen off. What's more, the nut on the drive side crankshaft hadn't been tightened either. It was loose and the engine sprocket Woodruff key was mangled.

It didn't take too long to sort that out. At the weekend I got stuck in and went through everything. As usual on Nortons, where the crankcase breather is piped back to the oil tank, there was a load of condensation-induced sludge in there. I cleaned all of that out. I checked everything I could: all engine bolts, valve clearances, chain tensions and in particular I meticulously cleaned and balanced the twin Monoblocs.

After that, it rode like a dream and I soon found out how quick it was. The acceleration made you slide back on the seat if you didn't hang on tight. Even with a passenger on the back, you would be clocking well over the ton. The downside was that fuel consumption was significantly worse than the 99, generally in the 50s mpg, but it could be worse if you were really trying. A worthwhile price to pay! **Ro**

**NEXT TIME:** accidents, adversity, recovery and... more featherbeds!

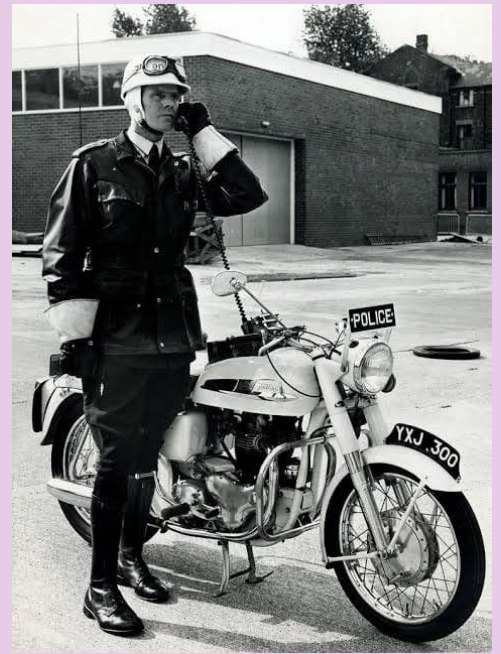
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Jack and Gary outside Gunnison



1944 Canadian soldier



Brough Superior and Sopwith Camel





## Norton for Sale



1974 Norton 850 Commando for sale. The engine is running and has recently been worked on. Gaskets will need to be replaced though. The motorcycle is currently located in the Denver Metro area. Asking price of \$10,000.

Please contact:

Mike Ehrmann at  
(720) 347- 0105

[Mikeehrmann20@gmail.com](mailto:Mikeehrmann20@gmail.com).

For more information.



This is the card of Bryan Flanigan, used to work at Vintage Twins. Started his own shop about 6 months ago. I've used him for vapor blasting, good guy. Also works on older Jap bikes. Harder and harder these days to find someone to work on classic stuff, spread the word to the club and bring him your business!

<https://trophyclassiccycles.com/>

King Browne



My name is Kevin Bulger and I am from Chicago. I live in Tanzania and my wife and I own [www.iridearusha.com](http://www.iridearusha.com). We do adventure motorcycle tours here in Tanzania in East-Africa.

I am looking to start bringing more Americans to explore this amazing country with us. iRide has been operating for 7 years in East-Africa and have guides, mechanics, bikes, follow cars, and all of the routes to have an amazing adventure.

If you think any of your club members could be interested in visiting, I would love to setup time to chat more about the possibilities.

Best,  
Kevin Bulger



## Motorcycle Stuff on the web:

Check out the club websites new photo galleries:

<https://nortoncolorado.org/galleries/>

Here's the link to the discussions page on the website:

<https://nortoncolorado.org/discussions/>

Race bike startup

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0u9vz-iXuY&t=10s>

15 Most Dangerous Motorcycles Ever Built I'll bet you have owned (or still own) some of these. Lots of Kawasaki's.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-56WT0HpbCY>

Just How Dangerous Are Motorcycles? Here's What The Data Says

<https://www.slashgear.com/1884397/are-motorcycles-dangerous-death-accident-statistics/>



Bob Herman's idea of a relaxing Sunday ride. Pretty adventurous.



Jesse Carraway mentioned that he recently acquired most of the used parts, and possibly a number of new ones, from Matt Rambow at Colorado Norton Works. Matt is no longer building complete bikes so he doesn't need that inventory. Jesse had previously purchased the inventory of the club's Parts Depot when we lost our storage site and he already had a large inventory of his own parts, so at this point I think it is safe to say Jesse has the largest inventory of Norton parts in Colorado. He is glad to help out fellow club members who are in need:

Jesse Carraway  
(303) 980-6641  
[jesse@fastmail.fm](mailto:jesse@fastmail.fm)



## ***Bob Herman has some Norton parts to sell:***

I have several Commando seats and a tailpiece that I don't need, and I'd like to offer them to club members before going to eBay or Craigslist with them I don't know what to charge but will take less from a Norton Colorado member than from an "outsider."

1 nice Mk3 seat with hinge

1 nice 750 seat

1 Fastback tailpiece - good shape except for a small crack (damaged in shipping, easily repaired)

I'm going to bring them up to Golden, they will be at Eric's house so a club member won't need to drive down here or pay a big shipping charge.

Bob Herman 719 256-4527; [romomoto@gmail.com](mailto:romomoto@gmail.com)

Eric Bergman [<bergman@csd.net>](mailto:bergman@csd.net)



Fastback tailpiece

MK3 seat



Bob Herman has added another toy to his collection. It's a 1951 model NH - which means 350.



Highrider seat base





## Norton Colorado 2025 Event Schedule

Here is the first draft of the club's 2025 event schedule. I've taken the liberty (based on past performance) of listing you as a host for an event. Please have a look and let me know if you are still willing to host an event, or if the date needs to be changed. Also, if you would like to host an event of some sort, please contact Eric.

February 8, 2025 (Saturday), 6:30pm, Winter Banquet, Mickey's Top Sirloin, 6950 N. Broadway, Denver.

March 23, 2025 (Sunday) Museum.

April 19, 2025 (Saturday), Group Ride.

May 18, 2025 (Sunday), Open Garage / Tech Day hosted by Al and Barb Slarks.

June 1, 2025 (Sunday), Big Tent BBQ hosted by Eric Bergman & Susan Saarinen.

June 7, 2025 (Saturday), 8am to 2pm, Colorado Vintage Motorcycle Show

June 12-15, 2025 (Thursday-Sunday), Four Corners Rendezvous hosted by Steve Harris and Charey Gremmels.

June 16-21, 2025 (Monday-Saturday), INOA Rally, Quincy, Cal

July 13, 2025 (Sunday), Mt. Evans Ride and Brunch hosted by David Sheesley.

July 20, 2025 (Sunday), BMAC Picnic hosted by Frank & Joanne Puckett.

August 3, 2025 (Sunday), BBQ and open garage hosted Jamie & Michelle Jones.

September 7, 2025, Sunday, Old Bike Ride.

September 14, 2025 (Sunday), English Motoring Conclave.

October 11, 2025 (Sunday), Plains Ride, hosted by Scott and Julie Robinson.

October 26, 2025 (Sunday), Open Garage, hosted by Jonathan Chaikin and Tamara.

November 8, 2025 (Saturday) Tech Day

December 7, 2025 (Sunday), Pub meeting.

January 1, 2026 (Thursday), Clancy's Irish Pub.

January 18, 2026 (Sunday), Pub meeting.

February 7, 2026 (Sat ) Winter Banquet.

Young Sophia Loren





## Membership

Membership in Norton Colorado is open to anyone, regardless of whether they own a Norton, or any motorcycle whatsoever.

Dues are \$25 per family unit, payable to "Norton Colorado" and sent to the Treasurer, whose contact information is listed on the last page of this newsletter.

The official club membership list is posted on the club website. Please let Eric know if there is an error.

The membership year begins with the Winter Banquet in February. New members who join after August 1 are credited with membership for the following year.

## Club Events

Many events have been scheduled for the 2024 season, usually about 2 per month. Participation in these events will be counted for the President's Award. Events may be added, dropped, or re-scheduled through the year. The schedule can be found in this newsletter or check the schedule on the club website:

<https://nortoncolorado.org/events/>

THE MOTOR CYCLE, 26 APRIL 1956

**We get more pleasure than ever...**

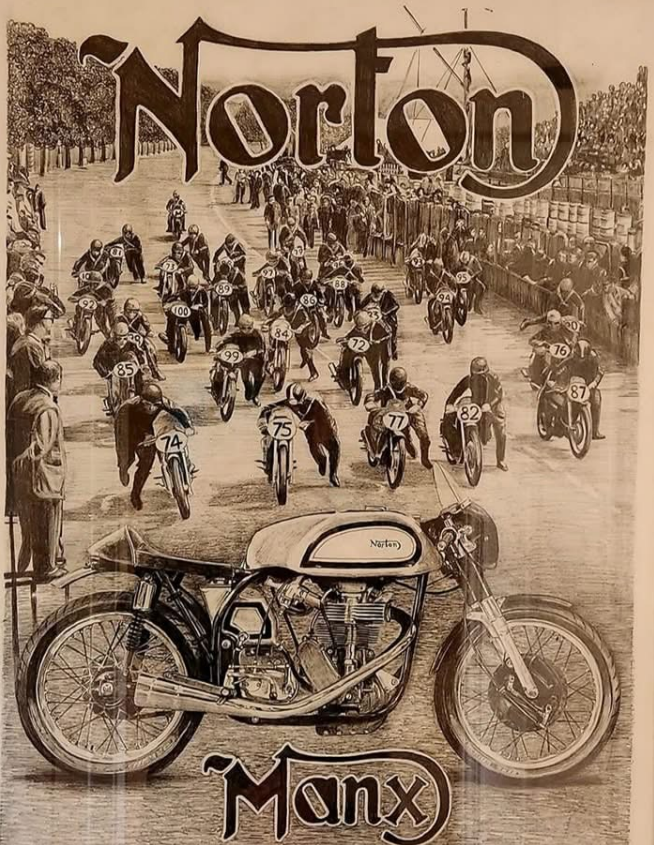
Since we teamed up a Norton 19s with our 'chair' we've discovered the real joys of sidecaring. For the gentle run around the English lanes or the mile-eating programme of the Continental tour the 19s is perfection itself. Fast enough for high averages, flexible enough for the most trying traffic conditions it laughs at long distances and makes light of heavy loads. With its superb suspension, wonderful brakes and thoroughbred good looks the 19s is a delight to ride and own. Its economical too and that's important when you've a family to consider. Time and again we've said how glad we are we bought a NORTON.

MODEL 19s  
(600 c.c. O.H.V.)



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**Norton**

**Manx**

1960 NORTON MODEL 304 / BACKGROUND: 1949 NORTON 17 WORKS LIMITED MANXTON - PREPARED BY CRIS HALLAM 2011



## Current Occupants

### Officers

#### **President**

Arnie Beckman (303) 733-4239  
[president@nortoncolorado.org](mailto:president@nortoncolorado.org)

#### **Secretary**

Eric Bergman (720)400-7835 **NEW #**  
[secretary@nortoncolorado.org](mailto:secretary@nortoncolorado.org)

#### **Treasurer**

Charley Gremmels  
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#### **Technical Advisor**

Jim Comstock (719) 646-2610  
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**Credits:** Thanks to Karen Bailey, Jim Colt, Michael Homs, Julian Kowalewski, Dennis Oberwetter, and Tom Staab for their contributions to this newsletter.

I also want to say thanks to others who sent me things I will use in future editions.

Norton Colorado  
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Golden, CO 80401

