

The front end of the Commando tracked perfectly over the rise, and the rear, with the spongy springing, reported back in fairly good shape, yeilding only a small oscillation that ceased quickly.

Then on to a short straight, brake to about 80 for a 30-degree right, the first turn in the Esses. The lack of sure braking was a deterrent here, as the turn may be banzaied much faster than first appears possible. The best riders go through fast enough to create an extra turn requiring a leftward flick of the machine before going right for a quickly following Turn 3.


The 420-lb. weight of the production racer is somewhat of a disadvantage in the Esses, as it resists the nine, deft flicking back-and-forth movements required from the entry of Turn 2 to the entry of the slow 180-degree Turn 6. That last turn is the one most likely to cause trouble to bikes with marginal ground clearance as it slams the decelerating machine sharply uphill, compressing suspension just about the time you must shove the bike over hard to the right at 60 mph. With no centerstand, the Commando passed this test well, the ground working against the rider's toe like a belt sander, foot pointed down on the pegs.

Then follows another third gear straight to Turn 7, the hairiest spot on the 2.55-mile "short" course used for motorcycle racing. The world gets very large and the rider very insignificant here, as the machine swoops downward and then back upward to a distant turn, invisible behind the crest of a hill. The rider must calculate his shut-off points precisely from the 4-3-2-1 markers on the shoulder. Just before the crest, a set of violent squiggles painted on the pavement reminds late-brakers that "it's all over, jack." Behind the crest awaits a steep drop and a slow first-gear left-hander, which becomes an adverse camber, because the line cuts across from the extreme right at the crest to an apex at the bottom of the hill.

Approaching Turn 7 requires two neat downshifts and hairline full-force braking. Not having the latter, we would have preferred backshifts on the Commando to be made with a positive downward jab of the foot, rather than the old-style upward toe pull. Apparently, someone who was used to the old pattern installed a reversed cam plate in the gearbox. Fortunately, reversing the lever to reach a rear-set peg on a stock Commando gearbox (which shifts one-up-three-down in normal position), makes it shift in the more preferable one-down-three-up pattern.

After a wide approach to Turn 7-A (Turn 8 is part of the long 3.3-mile big car course), you enter the back straight halfway in the middle, with a 2170-ft. run to Turn 9. Approaching peak revs in fourth gear, the rider has time to listen to the engine. The feeling on the Commando is fantastically smooth for a big Twin, as the rubber engine mounting isolates the engine, preventing vibration from getting through to the frame, bars, seat and pegs. Hence the name "isolastic." Displacement of 750 cc is the present practice maximum for a vertical Twin, and it is nearly impossible to balance it to run smoothly at all speeds. Norton found the answer: if you can't stop it from shaking, put it in quarantine.

Finally comes the rapid right-hand Turn 9, entered by bearing left through a dogleg at about 115 to 120 mph. Easy stuff on the Commando. The dogleg is hardly a turn as it is extremely wide and allows plenty of room for error. Then another 1000 feet to Turn 9, shift down to third and get ready to peel off at the "Good Grief!" sign following the distance markers.

Then, confidence inspired by the machine's stability, you are ready to go around again, and again. Only next time, maybe, you'll try the Esses just a little bit harder... 

NORTON PRODUCTION RACER

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....	n.a.
Suspension, front	.....	telescopic fork
Suspension, rear	.....	swinging arm
Tire, front	.....	Dunlop K81 3.60-19
Tire, rear	.....	Dunlop K81 4.10-19
Engine, type	.....	ohv vertical Twin
Bore x stroke, in., mm	....	2.87 x 3.50, 73 x 89
Piston displacement, cu. in., cc	.....	45.5, 745
Carburetion	.....	(2) Amal Concentric 30 mm
Ignition	.....	12V battery-coil
Claimed bhp @ rpm	.....	66 @ 7000
Oil system	.....	gear pump, dry sump
Oil capacity, pt.	.....	6.0
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.	.....	4.5
Recommended fuel	.....	premium
Starting system	.....	kick, folding crank

POWER TRANSMISSION

Clutch	.....	multi-plate, wet
Primary drive	.....	triplex chain
Final drive	.....	3/8-in. x 5/8-in. chain
Gear ratios, overall: 1		
5th	.....	none
4th	.....	3.83
3rd	.....	4.21
2nd	.....	5.10
1st	.....	8.35

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	.....	56.7
Seat height, in.	.....	29.5
Seat width, in.	.....	11.0
Handlebar width, in.	.....	23.0
Footpeg height, in.	.....	12.0
Ground clearance, in.	.....	5.0
Curb weight (w/half-tank fuel), lb.	.....	420
Weight bias, front/rear, percent	.....	46/54

PERFORMANCE

Top speed, mph	.....	131.02 @ 6500 rpm
Piston speed (@7000 rpm), ft./min.	.....	4080

TEST CONDITIONS

Air temperature, degrees F	.....	78
Humidity, percent	.....	60
Wind velocity, mph	.....	none
Strip alignment, relative wind:		

