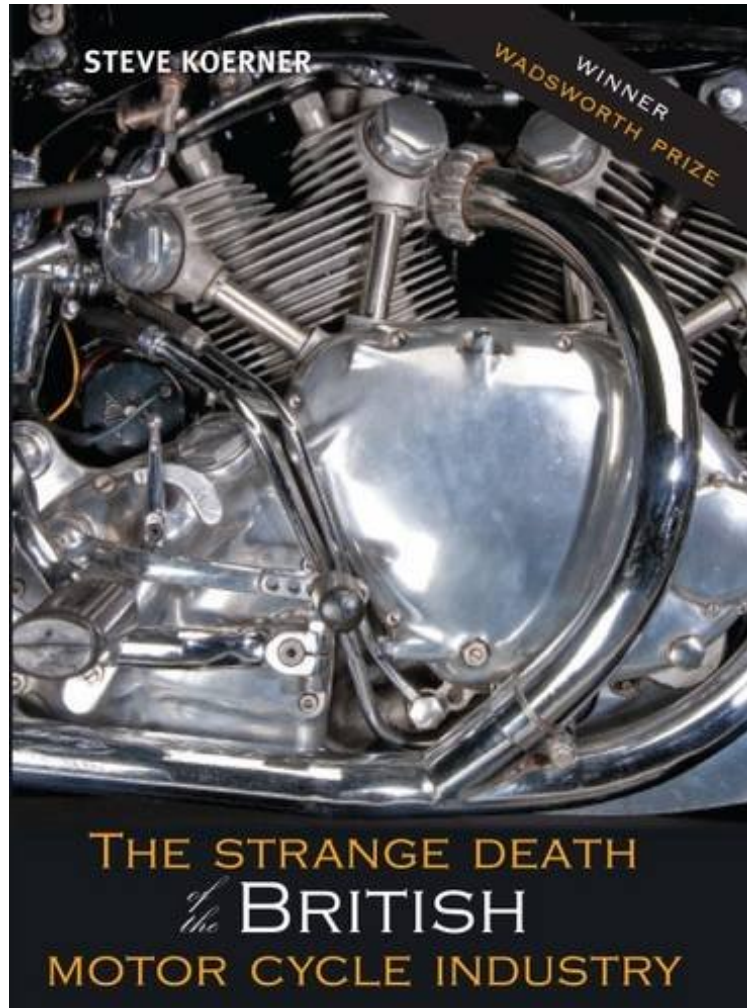


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The Strange Death of the British Motorcycle Industry

Steve Koerner

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#654746 in Books Carnegie Publishing 2013-08-01 2013-08-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.50 x 1.10 x 6.80l, 1.65 #File Name: 190547203X368 pages | File size: 69.Mb

Steve Koerner : The Strange Death of the British Motorcycle Industry before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Strange Death of the British Motorcycle Industry:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Informative and yet frustrating By M. Johnson This book tells the sad story of the English motorcycle industry which used to be at the top of the world, and after WW2 it evolved most slowly and got so behind that it was unable to compete when the Japanese potential showed up. I had hoped the book would be more colorful and anecdotal along with its tables of statistics, but found this to be slightly a dull read. The industry seemed to have tunnel vision, thinking it practically owned the big-bike market and did not need to 1) compete in the lightweight and middleweight categories, and 2) design new machines rather than gradually evolving very old designs. So many business decisions in hindsight looked miserly and unimaginative, preferring to extract profits rather than reinvest for future efficiency, innovation and profits. I was informed even the larger factories used a

"craft" type of assembly rather than a modern production line, and one factory used unpowered hand tools until the 1960's(!). This as at a time when Japanese were investing in fresh designs and automated, high capacity factories. I would have enjoyed the book more had it been a little less dry with its history, and pandered to us with more pictures and drawings of the machinery and racing, making the book's aim rather more like the cycle magazines. England has so much motorcycle history, and so many historians loving its past, that I had hoped for more entertainment. Everything seems to be well researched and footnoted, with 50+ pages of footnotes at the end of the book. Sometimes these yield entertaining anecdotes, e.g. an interview quote from a sales director who said "a 250cc showed no profit, 350cc a reasonable amount, and 500cc a substantial profit (which cost barely more than the 350cc designs)". The book would have been more entertaining and no less informative, if these footnotes were placed at the bottom of the relevant page rather than all collected after the main text. I did find what I suspect to be a major error. On page 156 there is a paragraph relating to the price rise 1956-60 among inexpensive cars and heavyweight cycles. The claim is a Norton 500cc twin was comparable to the cars and twice the price of a BSA 650 at 438-533 pounds sterling. This info is documented as from the "Buyers' Guide" contained in "The Motor Cycle". However it strains credibility the Norton product would command a price twice that of BSA, and I have a book "A Racing Legend: Norton" which documents far lower Norton twin prices which are competitive with BSA. This is a welcome addition to a library which is already filled, as the book gives you information you are unlikely to find anywhere else. It avoids too much emphasis on personal stories, and you can get the doting on enthusiast machinery from other magazines and books. I just wish it were a lighter read and somewhat more entertaining. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. well written factual account of the british motorcycle industry By Johnny r this book is a comprehensive account of the events contributing to what the author calls the death of the british motorcycle industry. its 277 pages of text and over 70 pages of detailed notes and references listing the sources including page numbers and how to find the pertinent publication giving this information. this is an impressive work chronicling these events starting from the beginning and covering through the seventies and maybe beyond (I haven't finished the book yet). this is not an afternoon's reading. this is a book with so much information it deserves to be studied instead. i believe that this book will emerge as the leading resource for information about this subject. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Probably the best book on this topic By mark bayer Probably the best book on this topic. I have several other books on the demise of the British motorcycle industry, and this is the best one out there. Worthy every penny!

The British motor cycle industry once stood at the top level of world production. BSA, Ariel, Norton, Triumph, Matchless and Vincent led the world in design, technology, and popularity. After 1945, when the German industry failed to develop, British bikes continued to be untouchable both on the racetrack and in the showroom. Then it all began to go horribly wrong. Lucrative overseas markets began to decline, and foreign scooters tore into the UK market. At the same time, rates of motorcycle accidents rose and many British consumers were deciding to buy cars instead of two-wheelers. Finally there came a whirlwind from the East, as fierce competition arrived from innovative, sophisticated and more mechanically reliable Japanese machines. By the early 1970s, with alarming rapidity, the British motor cycle industry had all but disappeared.

Koerner is as much a British motorcycle enthusiast as he is an academic, but he doesn't wax nostalgic about the industry. He is critical in hindsight, and although players in the trade aren't identified as heroes or villains, it's fairly obvious who they are.... Crippled by the early 1970s there is no easy answer regarding the downfall of the British industry, but Koerner's book is one of the better attempts at an in-depth exploration. Life is complicated, Koerner says. And there aren't simple explanations. It wasn't all Bernard Dackers' fault, nor was it German or Japanese manufacturers, or the attitude of management. It's simply not that simple to explain. (Greg Williams Motor Writer Automobiles, Trucks, Motorcycles old and new) "...packed with information and insights into the demise of the British motorcycle industry. Some of the material we've seen before. ...But mere facts are never enough. It's the analysis that counts, and Koerner has delved deeply into the root causes of the collapse of AMC, Ariel, BSA, Norton, Triumph et al, and has presented his arguments in an intelligent, readable and coherent way. There's plenty of boardroom intrigue and political machinations. And we're taken repeatedly into the filing cabinets and tool rooms and exposed to the atmosphere of an industry that, in hindsight, ultimately had nowhere to go but down.... we especially like is (a) the hard numbers backing up the aforementioned facts, and (b) the contextual information. In other words, this book gives you an all-important sense of time and place, and it highlights many other key issues around the country (and the world) that impacted on British motorcycle manufacture. Actually, there's one other point here worth mentioning. The book has hundreds of notes and references intended to underpin the facts and highlight the sources, and that naturally adds authority to this work." (Sump Magazine) About the Author STEVE KOERNER has a BA in history from the University of Victoria (Canada) and a PhD in Social History from the University of Warwick (England). Koerner lives in Victoria B.C. Canada. He is a long-time motorcycle enthusiast and owns a 1958 500cc Matchless G-80, a 1974 850cc Norton Commando as well as a 2000 Harley-Davidson Road King.