

Hejira!

PUB COLLECTORS may be delighted to know that the original Bull Hotel stands three doors from the original Cock in High Street, Stony Stratford.

But before any humourist conjures up an association of ideas with the 'Patch', I can assure you this isn't a cock and bull story, even though it started in the Bull bar. It was there I ran across a character partially obscured by a very large beard.

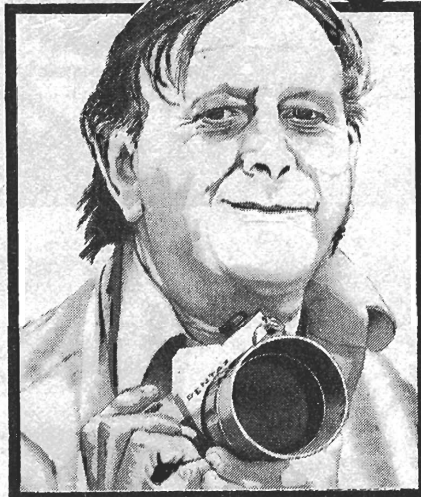
"Danny Wilson," said he by way of introduction. "Constructor of frames for the single cylinder racing fraternity, along with a partner in a firm called Hejira."

Wilson, I discovered, had the perfect credentials for a chassis builder. Ex-British Rail employee, time and motion study engineer at Aston Martin, antique dealer flogging Britain's heritage in the South of France, spare-time car racing driver, vintage motorcycle freak with a preference for Velocettes.

Perfect! Yet for some reason I was restrained from hot-footing along to witness the Hejira marvels first hand. You've got to be slightly cautious in this business, you know.

August in the Bull faded to a fond memory, the season's excitement

Jim Greening's



PATCH

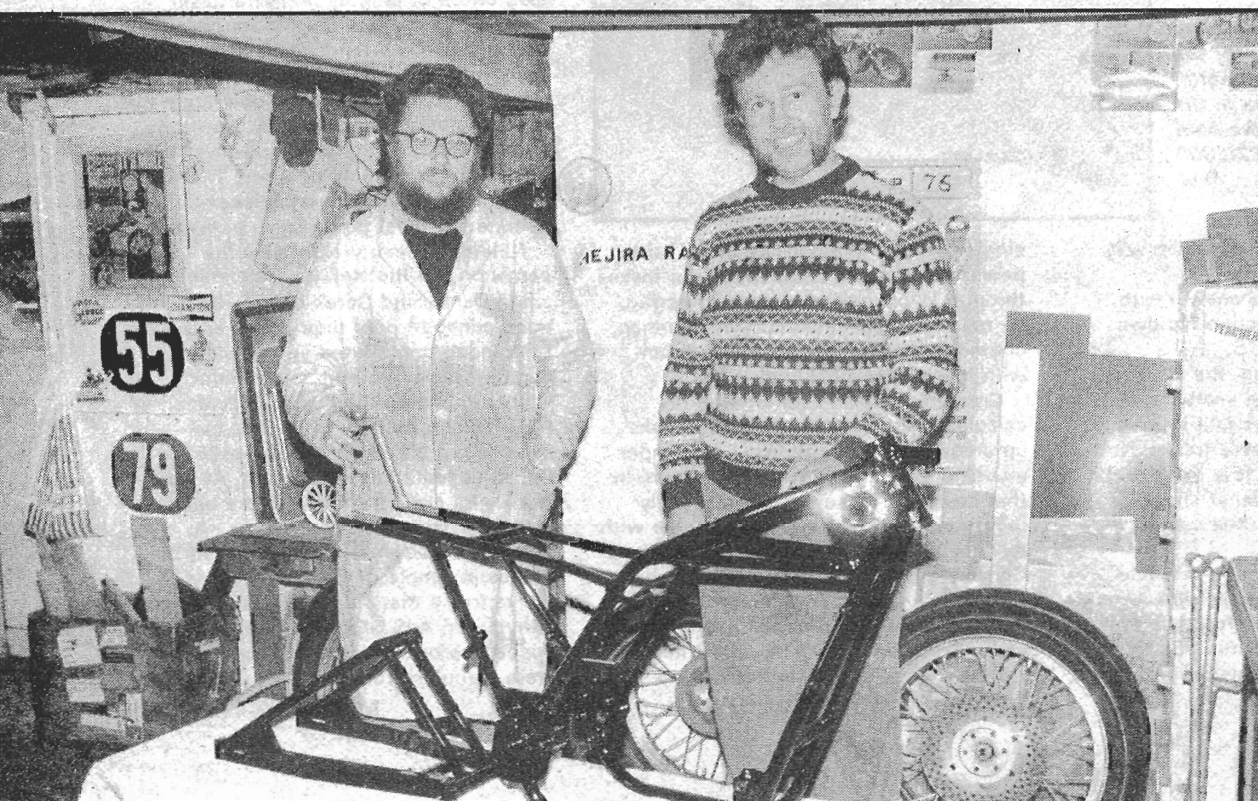
Flying high with single cylinders — thanks to two enthusiasts.

receded, Editor JB brought the January copy date forward, and yours truly galvanised into A413 action towards an outback Buckingham village.

Luckily for my then non-existent story, Hejira did — and does — reside there, housed in a farm building dating from 1655 with ground floor headroom measuring 5' 10½" and an adjacent pub called The Crown.

Hejira started life in the late 1960s with Derek Chittenden building moto cross frames for his mates, and enjoying himself immensely in a non-commercial manner. Tribsa and Metisse hybrids were still being raced in those days. So to distinguish his specials, ex-prep-schoolboy Chittenden coined "Hejira", the Arabic "to fly" as in "flight from Mecca."

Although six years younger than his



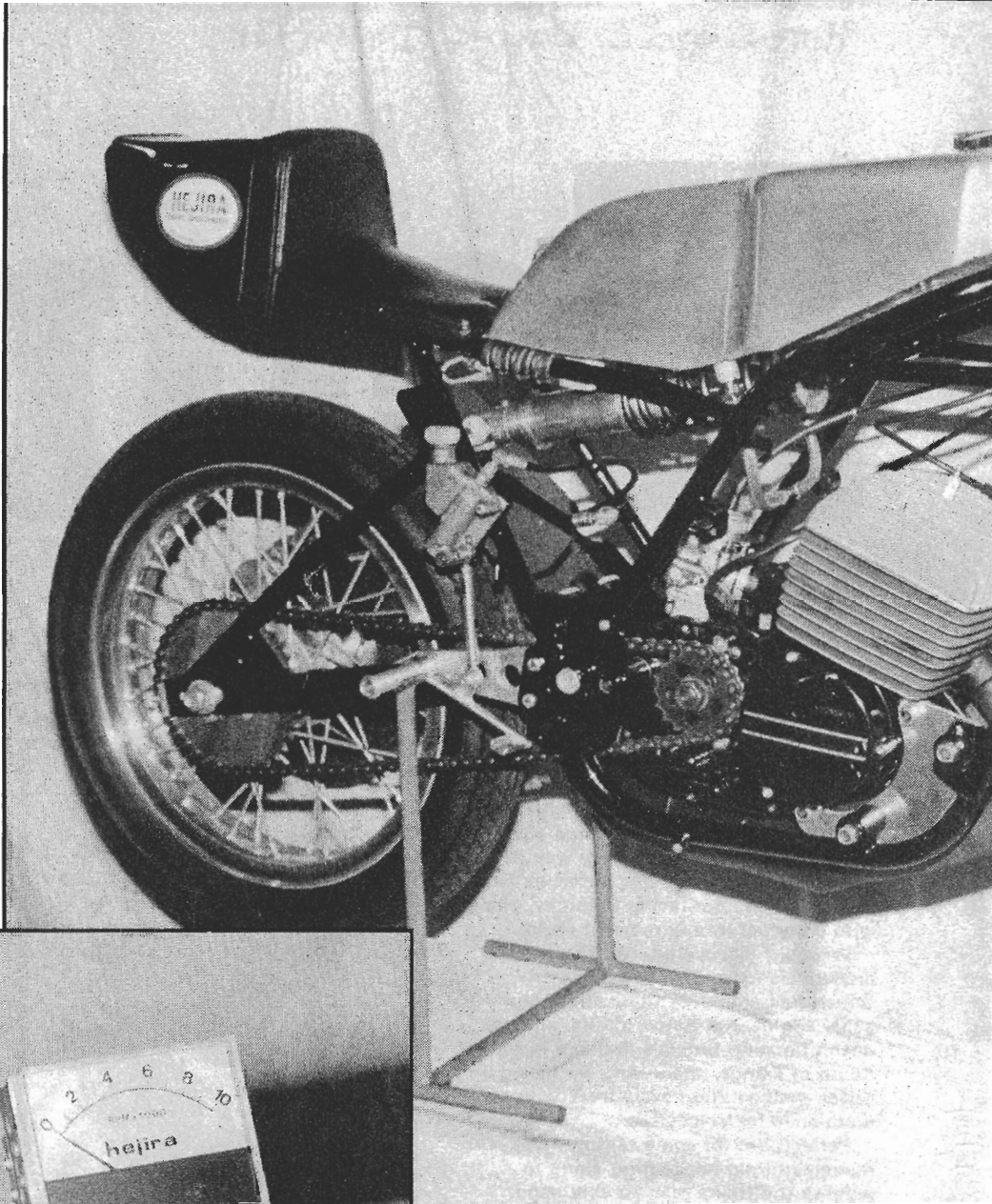
Bearded Danny Wilson and Derek Chittenden with a frame in their machine shop.

Hejira!

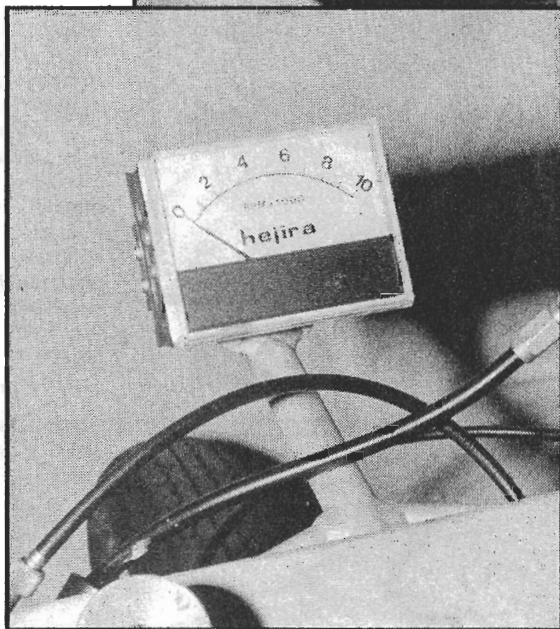
future partner – 40 and 46 now – Chittenden followed Wilson through the BR engineering apprenticeship before graduating to face a post-Beeching axe. Naturally the railway background served as an ideal recommendation for his next job as quarry driver and self-taught explosive expert – he has his own fingers to prove it, too – prior to settling down as an engineering employee and part-time frame builder.

In 1974, he became involved with road racing by assembling a 250cc Ducati-powered racer with cantilever swinging arm and monoshock suspension. That's right, 1974, and whether or not he remembers, *MCR's* Mick Grant tested the bike and pronounced favourably on the handling characteristics. Unfortunately, Mick's "to be published" comments failed to reach the print shop and finished in someone's waste bin.

Raced by former Tiger Cub champion Ian Gittins, the machine went well enough within the limitations imposed by



ABOVE: Hejira's 250 Rotax monoshock beauty. The next step is watercooling.



RIGHT: Big orders are now being taken for the Hejira tachometer. There's one in the offing from the boat world for a £20,000 deal.

the single suspension unit which was down on strength and short in movement. The obvious answer – to Derek – was to manufacture his own pneumatic shock in 1975.

Unquestionably strong, the strut still survives with its original seals intact, having gone through the mill in road races, scrambles and grass tracks. Now, along with six replicas, it is used to run comparison tests with other shocks, including the Spax which is catalogued Hejira wear.

Monoshock development, it would appear, isn't a day and a half job.

On completion of the prototype unit, Chittenden directed his attention to increasing suspension travel. Since

single-cylinder straight-line brake horse power could never compensate for losses through skippy wheels when cornering, he reasoned that reliable tyre-to-tarmac contact was more than ever important with low power machinery.

Creature comfort also entered his calculations, given that the rider soaks up a considerable proportion of damper movement by the act of sitting down. In that case, the jockey would obviously feel more confident and comfortable with reasonable wheel travel left to command. Consequently Chittenden arranged the geometry to provide up to seven inches travel when using the Spax gas-oil unit with 15-position damping adjustment.

As a realist, Chittenden makes no

claim to have "discovered" the long-suspension principle unilaterally. Like others in the frame-making game, he's also aware of lengthy rear-end travel provoking front fork dive under heavy braking. That's a tendency Derek wants to restrain, but one possible solution by way of a mechanical anti-dive system has already provoked a couple of questions.

Why nuts and bolts for anti-dive? Why not control by microprocessor? That low and ancient ceiling certainly seems to liberate the most progressive notions.

Nineteen seventy-eight saw the cementing of the Hejira partnership when Danny and Derek reckoned it made good sense to pool their entire assets. Chittenden contributed an innovative engineering mind, a growing frame clientele, and all the business acumen of a fly. Wilson brought in commercial expertise, a bit of capital, and a 250cc Ducati collected as a bad debt. At least the Hejira crew started with the basics of a factory racer.

Nineteen seventy-eight produced the earliest example of the present-day Hejira frame that superceded the version carrying an AJS Stormer engine with six-speed gearbox. Altogether four "Hejays" were manufactured, three for racing and

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one for development, but none of the engines reached expectations.

Constructed from one inch diameter by 16-gauge T45 steel tubing, the 1981 twin-loop Hejira monoshockers feature swinging arms pivoting in taper roller bearings spaced well apart. Being evolved mainly for 125 and 250cc singles, the frames are light and, as they say, plenty strong enough. This claim was fully justified by a customer who wanted, "that frame there to take this 500 Velo." It hasn't broken yet.

Seemingly at odds with the small-operator concept, House of Hejira electronic rev-counters are a normal part of the race-bike specification. It began more or less by accident when Hejira riders and constructors got together in a paddock-scowling session over an expensive, foreign and busted tach. By chance, one of the three riders professed certain whizz-kid leanings in the electronic line — and if he couldn't make something better and cheaper he'd take up lawn mowing.

Amazingly the kitchen-table product worked with commendable accuracy and reliability, to the extent of attracting orders for replicas. Which, as it transpired was bad news for the electro-kid who

considered himself a one-off specialist and not a production line robot. With that, he trotted down the Bucks lane and handed the manufacturing rights to Messrs D and D, whose electronic capabilities just about extended to fitting a light bulb.

The end? Not at all. By another of those amazing coincidences Hejira persists in generating, a Snetterton regular happened to be a departmental research head at Pye of Cambridge. Consequently he offered to take the "grandfather clock" home and productionise it to a viable commercial product.

Nowadays he's working on electronic ignition capable of providing the same range of advanced and retard available from the old time handlebar lever and magneto — very handy for your unsophisticated single cylinder motor.

Considering all this sounds suspiciously like a success story, you may wonder why Chittenden and Wilson don't drag themselves from the barn to compete with the likes of Bakker by framing TZ and RG grand prix five-hundreds.

Their reply is a somewhat ambiguous, "To remain masters of our destiny,"

freely interpreted as meaning their clubman-level dealings prove consistently friendly, rewarding and marginally profitable.

If pressed, they admit to feeling that associating with the professionals could be counter productive, not only because pro-racers have been known to demand financial favours from suppliers.

The main deterrent to moving up-market immediately is the danger of overstretching the slim financial resources of their two-man-band operation, while making frames to order for paddock pals offers greater security. However, expansion will eventually come, with a startling variation on the beam-frame theme most likely.

Mind you, they nearly entered the big league by becoming exclusive importers of Honda Red Rocket engines — as used in Japanese national racing — before a surcharge and cash-flow considerations knocked the idea on the head.

At another point, Hejira almost became the racing arm of a continental mass-producer of engines. This affair started when Danny and Derek obtained an attractively-priced Sachs 250 which they despatched to Dave Hunter for investigation, and Hunter's judicious tweaking returned it as a rather rapid racing device.

Not long afterwards, the glad tidings reached the engine importers who arranged a meeting with an important personage from the Sachs engineering team. Obviously impressed, the German gent left a promise to supply detailed factory information on Sachs super-tune.

Nothing arrived for ages, and when it did it wasn't the anticipated performance-data file, but a brief note of advice. "Please refrain from abusing our engine," it read. "This delightful street-bike unit is not for racing or any form of competition. Said engine will collapse in tiny heaps if subjected to revs-per-minute exceeding 8,000."

Knowing no better, riders had been clocking 10,000 rpm during 916 racing miles comprising 17 races that produced a win at Brands and nothing lower than tenth. Somewhere along the line, the Sachs decided it needed a new piston ring.

Incidentally, Hejira is not entirely local-clubman-orientated. For in spite of the workshop's obscurity, a Swede turned up with a 125cc disc valve watercooled Rotax for decorating with an appropriate racing frame.

One-two-five and 250 models feature in the 1981 plans of part-sponsorship, with Vernon Glasier, Paul Eden and Richard Hunter receiving bargain-buy Hejiras and free service. BMCR 250 "single" champion Glasier is booked for the 250 Rotax ride; impressive up-and-comer Eden is the Sachs man; F-3 exponent Hunter gets Oriental-powered TT-Formula bike.

Who says motorcycle racing is dying through neglect and want of creativity?