
Matchless reloads legendary Model X

09 December 2014 | Simon de Burton

Is one of Britain's very first, large-scale motorbike makers (and the first winner of the Isle of Man TT in 1907), about to be revived... not just as a fashion brand, but also as an evocative name on real-life new motorcycles? It looks like it is...

In today's fast-moving world, there isn't always time to make history - so it's just as well that it's often readily available to buy. A case in point could be seen in lot 554 of a Bonhams auction held on 23 April 2006 at Stafford in the north of England, where the opportunity arose to bid for one of the greatest names in motorcycling: Matchless.

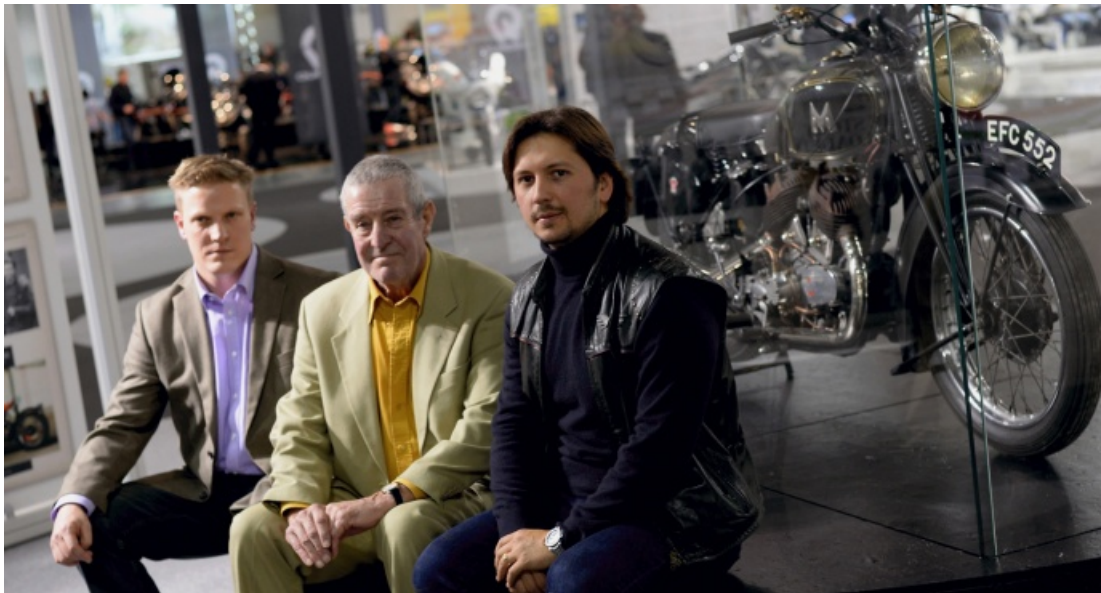
Slow bidding for a fast legend





After some fairly slow bidding, the rights to the Matchless marque were sold for £45,500 including buyers' premium – and then, for several years, things went quiet. Precisely who the Bonhams buyer was remained confidential, but it seems likely that it was the current owner of Matchless, the Italian Malenotti family. Franco Malenotti is a talented motorcycle designer and rider from a wealthy movie-making dynasty who went to work for the British clothing brand Belstaff in the 1980s. He ended up rescuing the company when it fell into financial difficulties, moving it from its original base in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, to a new location near Venice.

Another Belstaff in the making?



In a relatively short space of time, Malenotti transformed Belstaff from an ailing maker of motorcycle kit to an ultra-cool, luxury label beloved of the Hollywood set – and, in the summer of 2011, the firm was sold to the Swiss-based Labelux group for a sum thought to have been in excess of 100 million euros. And now Franco Malenotti is hoping to repeat the feat with the revival of Matchless as an equally trendy fashion brand, which recently launched its first range of chic and beautifully made, biker-inspired clothing for men and women.

A return to motorcycle production



Perhaps more interestingly, however, Matchless is also hinting at a return to motorcycle production with an all-new machine called the Model X Reloaded, unveiled at November's EICMA show in Milan. Inspired by the original V-twin Model X built between 1929 and 1940, the 'Reloaded' version is powered by a punchy, 1916cc S&S engine complemented by classic accents such as fish-tail silencers, wire spoked wheels and a heavily chromed fuel tank with inset instruments. If the bike goes into production, it is unlikely that more than 100 machines will initially be made - and they will probably carry a price tag of around 50,000 euros. If the Matchless name really is going to make it back to the road, it is truly good news - not least because the marque, founded in the 1890s in Plumstead, South London, was one of Britain's very first, large-scale motorcycle manufacturers and the first winner of the inaugural Isle of Man TT in 1907.

But let's not get too excited before anything more substantial happens. After all, motorcycles are a lot harder to sell and a lot less profitable than luxury clothes - even when they do carry one of the most evocative names in two-wheeled history.

Photos: Matchless / Bonhams / Getty Images

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