

WLA WORLD

You may have noted a couple of members riding perfectly restored examples of the military Harley Davidson WLA, including the pin-up boy 'Corporal' Wright on the cover of the last *Drip Feed*. 'Sergeant' Carmody has been rallying his WLA and collecting 'gongs' in the military category for some years.

The venerable 45c.i. (750cc) side-valve 'foot soldier' of the allied forces during WWII, around 70,000 WLAs (including Canadian WLC and South African variants) were made as well as spares for considerably more. Readily available after the war, many WLAs returned to civilian life and were a common sight hauling tradesman's boxes in the austere post-war years. Over the passing decades the humble but hardy WLA has developed a strong following for historic racing, customisation and restoration in both civilian and military trim.

VMCC member Gary Kirkness has a passion for WLAs and has been rebuilding them for around 30 years. Ten years ago he purchased a very large stock of bikes and parts and decided to leave his corporate job to pursue his passion, restoring WLAs. Since then Gary has built a successful business in a huge shed behind his home. Both of the WLAs mentioned at the beginning of this article are Gary's handiwork.

I recently visited Gary's workshop at Kenthurst. The cavernous shed is filled with customer's bikes and Gary's own collection, workbenches



The workshop. Customers' HDs on workbenches, including J model and big 1935 1340cc ULH behind. WLC (Canadian variant) in foreground.



dotted with engines and gearboxes, a machining area and mezzanine floor full of new OEM (NOS) parts and used spares. There is a frame and fork repair area with jigs and an area for painting. Everywhere you look there are Harley frames, wheels, engine parts, you name it.

While the business specialises in the military years 1939-45, Gary is also well acquainted with earlier Harleys back into the mid-1930s including the OHV models. I noted a customer's 1920 J model on the bench, so it seems Gary's arm can be twisted to occasionally take on a vintage HD. VMCC President Hans has availed to Gary's workshop services.

As well as complete bike restorations, the business does HD engine and gearbox rebuilds, and frame and fork repairs. Gary repaired Con's beautiful knucklehead after it was damaged in a crash at the annual rally at Orange a couple of years ago. This kind of knowledge and expertise is a boon for pre-1948 Harley Davidson enthusiasts.

Above: The cylinder store.



WLAs at every turn. Can you tell which of these is the South African variant?



So, if you would like to join the ranks with Sgt. Carmody and Corp. Wright, or prefer your 'civies', Gary can help you out.

Graham Goodwin.



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M: 0407 283 933

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