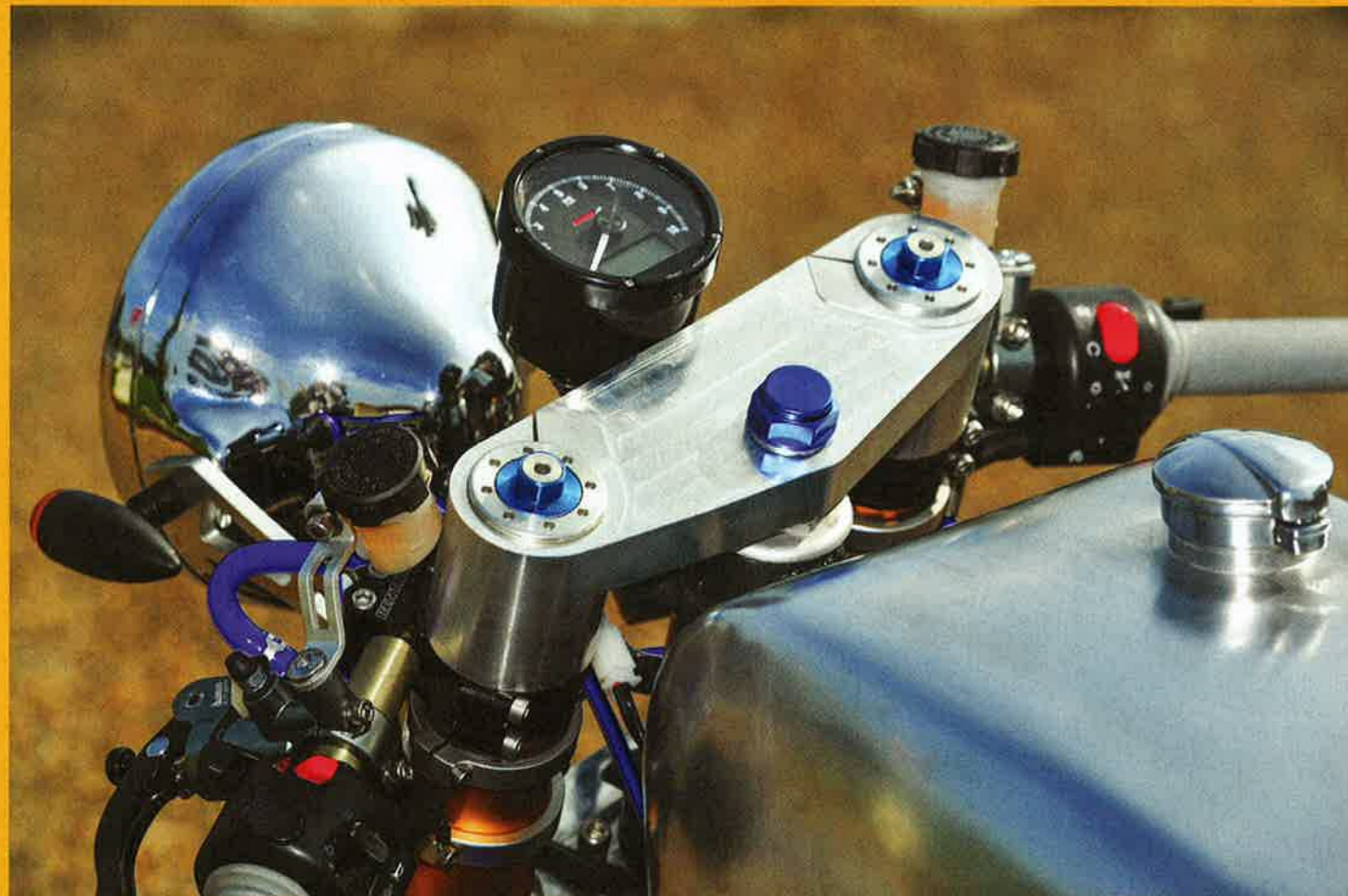


A Winning Trophy

Story by Linda Wilsmore
Photos by Simon Everett

Steve Brown (aka Brownie) is one of the new wave of professional bike builders who have taken a lifelong hobby and made it into a lifestyle business. He started Brownies Cafe Racers Ltd in 2013 after building his radical street racer Suzuki GT550 dragon bike, which drew so much attention at local motorcycle events that he decided to try to make a living from something that he really enjoys doing.





Based just north of London in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire in England, he built the Triumph Trophy 900 cafe racer in his home based workshop. Brownie recalls, "A mate told me that he knew of a Triumph Trophy 900 that was for sale at a good price. It had been sitting undercover in a back yard for over eleven years. I bought it after having a look and hearing it running not quite knowing what I could do with this fully faired touring bike. After getting it home, I run it up, the engine sounded great, so I decided to take off all the fairing and panniers to see what the machine looked like naked. As soon as it was stripped, I stepped back to admire the body, I instantly felt a stirring inside and could visualise what I was going to build. Sometimes the vision of what the build is going to look like comes to me straight away, other times it takes weeks to evolve. I had given myself a challenge with this one as the bike was in a sorry state. The engine paint was flaking badly, years of road grime



and the effect of standing for years had taken its toll."

Brownie has been a motorcycle enthusiast for 50 years, since childhood. On the blog page of his website (www.caf racer.org.uk) is a great photo of himself aged three sitting on his grandfather's Matchless sidecar outfit. "I can remember being fascinated with motorcycles as a kid, and helping my grandfather and uncle, who lived next door, to repair their bikes and coming home covered in oil and grease."

Part of Brownie's vision was to open up the rear end of the bike to have as much air as possible between the rear wheel and tail. He had an aluminium seat and tail unit that he'd made previously and not used, so he started by removing the exhausts and footrest brackets then cutting off the bike's original seat supports to mock up the seat. It was at this point that the bike's new owner entered the scene. Potential customer, Denis Baddeley, came to talk to about a commissioned build, but when he walked into Brownie's workshop he took one look at the project and instantly said, "I want that bike."



Denis had initially come to enquire about building a cafe racer based on either a Ducati or a Triumph triple. They talked about their joint visions and agreed that they were both after the same look, akin to that of the new Norton Domiracer. In effect, Denis wanted the build to be the cafe racer that he thought Triumph should have built. A number of project meetings ensued where Denis, his son Elliot and Brownie would get their heads together to fine tune the design.

However, the build threw up a number of challenges as do most custom builds. Brownie told me "During the build I discovered the Latin phrase for Custom = "F##k all fits!"

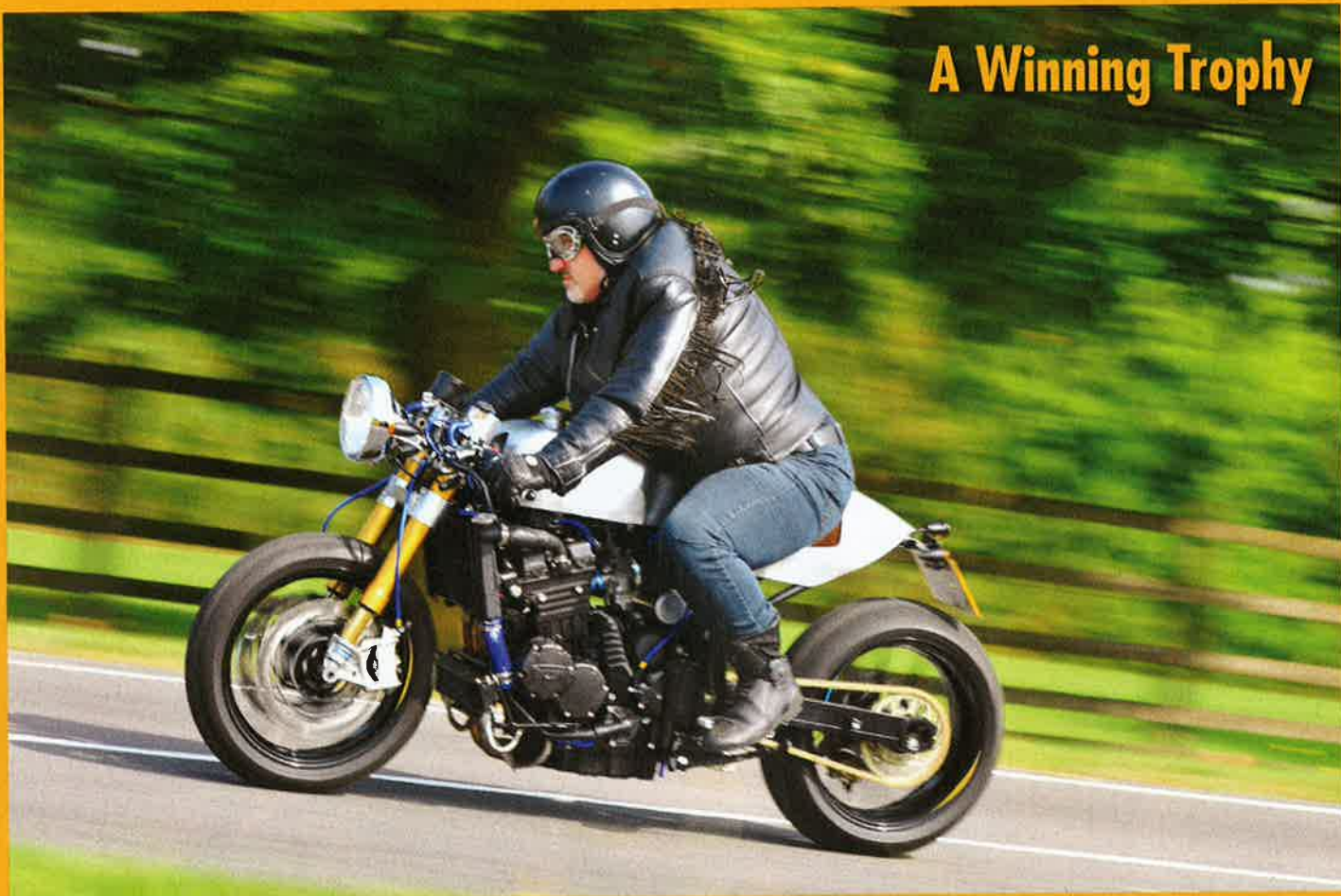
The design criteria included having Ohlins suspension, Brembo brakes and Marchesini wheels. Brownie recalls, "Getting the front end right was a crucial aspect of the project. I managed to find a nearly new set of Ohlins USD forks from a Triumph Speed Triple, a used pair of Marchesini wheels from an R1, leaving me to design a custom set of yokes. Roy Martin of Martin CNC made a great job of making the trees. They fitted like a glove."



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Clean lines and correct proportions are fundamental in making a bike that's aesthetically pleasing. A key aspect of this build was getting the tail and seat unit spot on. Many hours were spent getting the shape right for the tail unit, and Brownie lost count of how many times he tacked up the shape, tried it on the frame, cut it off and jumped back on the English wheel. "I was adamant that the design would be correct," Brownie said. In the end he got his Sofia Vergara moment. "It was worth the effort as the rear end just makes you want to run your hand over it," he purred.

Denis wanted a suede leather seat with blue stitching which gave Brownie the idea of accenting the rest of the bike with the blue silicone hoses. The blue colour really pops and adds a feature to draw the eye. The rear sets were made from aftermarket parts and the bottom of the frame section was modified to accommodate them. After removing the original Triumph foot pedal mounting brackets, they welded up the structure to add back the strength. A new radiator and oil cooler was fitted to the modified fixings, to give a bit more clearance from the front tyre.

A tubular aluminium radiator expansion



vessel was fabricated and fitted just under the carb air filters. This helped fill up the engine compartment, as this section of the bike was to look packed full with the power unit. This effect makes a good contrast to the open look of the rear end and focuses the eye to the centre of the bike. "The swing arm was left as standard; the look and feel of it were OK for the rest of the bike. We did have to modify the ally brake mount to suit a Brembo rear caliper as we could not find a standard Brembo to fit. The finish on the tank and seat unit was designed to create an industrial/handmade appearance. This was achieved by rubbing it over with a Scotchbrite as we didn't want a polished finish," said Brownie.

The free flowing exhaust and air filters came into their own when they took the finished bike down to DWR in Aylesbury, where Dave Wood put it through its paces on the dyno. Dave re-jetted the carbs and achieved over 100bhp at the rear wheel which is a bit more than when it was new. With an estimated top speed of 140mph, what's it like to ride? "Brilliant," says Brownie, "Cornering is really tight, it sounds fantastic and with the twin 320mm discs and Brembo brakes, stops on a sixpence." **CR**