

## 1965-1970 BSA 441 Victor



by Moshe Levy

Introduced in 1965, the 441 Victor was BSA's answer to customer demand for a replica of World Motocross Champion Jeff Smith's works motocross machine. Many features were lost in translation, but the Victor was a huge sales success for BSA.

**B**ACK IN THE mid-1960s, it seemed as though Britain was on the vanguard of all things cultural, especially for motorcyclists. The great English marques were in their heyday, mods and rockers were at each others' throats, rock and roll was finally emerging, and legendary hangouts like the Ace Café were in full swing. In 1964, a young Englishman named Jeff Smith would do the Crown proud by winning the FIM 500cc Motocross World Championship, taking the title from defending Swedish champion Rolf Tibblin. Smith won again in 1965, the last time a four-stroke machine would dominate the competition for some three decades hence.

Smith's conquest of the grueling back-to-back motocross championships was performed aboard a modified version of BSA's B44 Shooting Star model. His B44 street scrambler was modified for motocross duty with some factory trick components, including a 7" rear brake, 20" front wheel, lightweight Reynolds 531 tube frame, and an all-alloy motor with chrome bore. Smith's bike weighed only 250 lbs. wet, resulting in a relatively flickable machine with a power-to-weight ratio well suited to this type of racing.

Motocross fans expressed demand for such a machine from the factory, and so BSA worked quickly to capitalize on

Smith's success, introducing the first off-road motocross model B44 "Victor" at the 1965 Earls Court Show.

Several variations of the Victor were produced, though very few of them bore much resemblance to Smith's triumphant motocrosser beyond displacement and general appearance. The American-market "Victor Special" (sold in England as the "Victor Enduro Trials") looked the part, though BSA skimmed on many of the functional components that distinguished Jeff Smith's machine from the mass produced version. The rear brake shrunk from Smith's 7" to 6", the front wheel was reduced from 20" to 19", and the production frame didn't employ the lightweight alloys utilized on the racer to keep weight down. As a result, the production Victor Special ballooned to over 300 lbs. wet.

In exchange for these cost saving measures, the Victor Special's MSRP was a mere \$895 for the '66 model year. In England, a version of the Victor closer in spec to the original Smith racer dubbed the "Victor Grand Prix" sold closer to a whopping \$1400, giving credence to BSA's decision to keep the machine affordable.

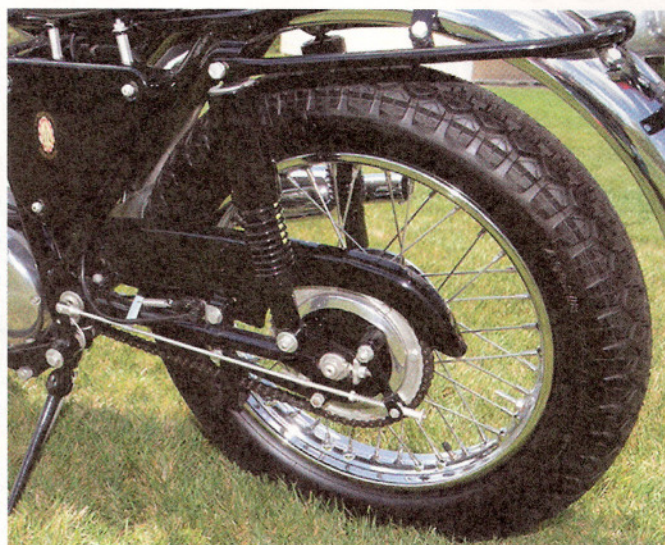
The production Victor's 441cc unit-construction single was long stroker, with a bore of 3.11" and a stroke of 3.55". Its

three-ring, full-slipper piston was housed in a cast iron bore, and a removable compression plate was utilized under the cylinder, limiting the ratio to 9.5:1. Horsepower was approximately 30 in this state of tune. The compression plate could be removed to create a stratospheric "racing spec" compression ratio of 11.4:1—good for another 5-10 hp—at the cost of engine longevity and inevitable knee injuries sustained at the kick starter, which could easily launch you toward the heavens if you weren't careful. Even with the stock compression ratio, the Victor could be a bear to kick-start. BSA installed a compression release to make kick-starting the Victor easier, but the mechanism would sometimes stick, destroying the top end of the motor. Because the stock 9.5:1/30 hp configuration was more than sufficient for most applications, most Victors still have their compression plates installed today.

The motor delivered its power to the multi-disc, oil-bathed clutch via duplex chain, with a traditional final drive by chain. The transmission's four speeds were evenly spaced and well suited to the low-end grunt of the long-stroke thumper. A 32mm Amal carburetor was standard, as usual for a British machine of this vintage. As with other Amals, sticking floats, tuning maladies and the occasional bro-



**Above:** The Victor's "round barrel" 441cc single was actually based on BSA's 250cc cases. The compact unit made 30hp.



**Above:** While Smith's factory bike featured a 7" rear brake, the stock Victor rear brake measured 6" in diameter.

ken slide being sucked into the motor were not uncommon.

All told, the Vic' could scoot through the quarter in about 15.5 seconds at 85 mph, and onward to a top speed of approximately 93 mph—a scant 7 mph shy of the magical "ton."

Front and rear suspension was carried over from BSA's street bike parts bin. The front forks had 5.25" of travel, along with compression and rebound damping. The rear Girling hydraulically damped coil spring shocks were preload adjustable to three positions. Any serious motocrossing could overwhelm the suspension, but it was adequate for street use. With the short, 52" wheelbase of its single downtube cradle frame factored in, handling was a delicate compromise between the Victor's two conflicting missions of off-road and on-road. Aftermarket modifications to remedy perceived suspension shortcomings were common as a result.

Instruments and electrics were traditional English. A classy Smiths speedometer housed an odometer and separate trip odometer, while power was supplied by Joseph Lucas, aka "The Prince of Darkness," a reputation that endures and needs no further elaboration.

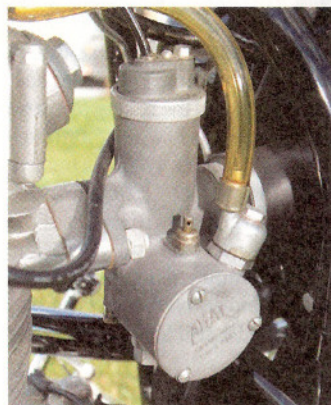
Regardless, one cannot focus on purely functional issues when discussing any classic or vintage English motorcycle. This is an emotional topic. The Victor's gorgeous, bulbous polished aluminum gas tank, high-side chrome exhaust pipe, and aggressive stance can melt the heart of any true motorcycle enthusiast. Not to mention its loping single-cylinder motor, which sings the thumper song of a time long since passed, when a Beeza ruled the track.

The American public at large was enamored with the Victor, and it sold well in 441 guise between 1965 and 1970. In 1971, its motor was punched out to 499cc,

and it was refocused as the B50, but by then BSA was well on its way out of the American market.

As of press time, a nice vintage Victor 441 Special can be had for \$2500-3500. Basket cases can be had for significantly less, while pristine or restored originals cost more. The vintage British motorcycle community is extremely vibrant, and BSA Victor parts are readily available. Prospective owners need only search the web for their local vintage English motorcycle club, where a wealth of experience and information awaits. A good place to start online is <http://www.britbike.com>.

*Editor's note: MCN would like to thank motorcycle collector Tom White for allowing us to photograph his beautifully restored 1966 BSA 441 Victor Special for the purposes of this feature. You can check out more of White's expansive vintage bike collection at [www.earlyyearsofmx.com](http://www.earlyyearsofmx.com).*



**Above Left:** The Victor's 32mm Amal carburetor. The brass plunger in the center is the "tickler" or starting enrichener. **Above Right:** Smiths speedometer also featured a tripmeter.



**Above:** After a successful six-year run, the 441 Victor gave way to a more powerful BSA single, the B50. Today the bike is highly regarded by collectors as a bargain classic.