

# NEOTT MotoTrials

*Find Your Edge...*

## NEOTTNews - Special Edition - The story of JB Miller's Fraser-Framed 1976 Honda TL250

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Rick "Brand X" Land put together this great story of a bike he first came across when it was new in 1976 and some 40+ years later he came across it again and restored it to better than new. Beyond the restore, it is a story of two long-time riding buddies and some of the key players in the formation of trials in the central US, including NEOTT's own Mike McCabe.

Now you may be wondering "what is a Fraser frame"? Don't feel bad, even "Alexa" doesn't know so we had to go old school and dig around on the web. Near as we can tell – the late Colin Tipping, doing business as "David Fraser Products" in Redditch, England produced a chrome plated, square tubing kit frame to reduce weight, improve handling and it absolutely gave a works-like look to the bikes. Not many of these custom frames were made and only a handful made it to the US.

So grab a snack, your favorite biggee-sized beverage, settle in and enjoy...

As I was visiting with Mike Cramsey while writing the article commemorating my win of the first Sooner Cup event, I mentioned a connection that I knew of between his club NEOTT and a club near and dear to my heart, [MATT](#) (Mid-America Trials Team).

This is a story about two guys that had a dramatic impact on the trials world here in the central United States. They both formed clubs that we are all familiar with, the Mid America Trials Team (MATT) and the North Eastern Oklahoma Trials Team (NEOTT). John (JB) Miller formed MATT and Mike McCabe formed NEOTT back in the early 70s.

Because of their foresight, dedication and love of the sport they organized these clubs that still provide great events and have provided hundreds, or maybe thousands of people the opportunity to compete in local monthly trials, two-day events and National Championship events held by both organizations through the decades. But there's another thing these guys did together, they put together a really cool motorcycle that I'm glad to say has survived the decades and is still chugging along today. JB's Fraser Honda!

This is a story that's going to take you back to the mid 1970s. I'm going to tell the parts of it I know and I've asked JB to put pen to ink and tell us a little about what was going through his mind back in those days that compelled him to build the Fraser Honda. So, hang on, and here we go...

Back in the mid 70s I was a member of the Topeka Trials Club, there was also a super nice guy by the name of Lyle Dreher in our club and he rode a Bultaco. Lyle's Bultaco had the nasty habit of running backwards at the worst times...like there's a good time for something like that? Anyway, one day it did it at the top of a big hill climb. Lyle had just made it to the top of the hill when the Bul chugged, coughed and took off backwards down the hill with Lyle still attached. He survived but didn't ride the Bul much longer and decided to get something that ran forward all the time, he came home with a Honda TL250. I worked for Lyle during the summer and remember seeing the Honda in his shop when he bought it, so I've known this bike since it was new...got your curiosity going yet?

As it turned out, a couple of years later Lyle wasn't riding the Honda anymore and an offer came in from someone to buy it, that was JB Miller. He had been bitten by the 4-stroke bug while watching a young Marland Whaley ride the super trick factory Honda at the 1976 Kansas City National Trials that MATT had hosted. So, with that I'll take you into JB's part of the story that ties the MATT club, NEOTT club, a David Fraser Frame from England and a TL250 from Japan all together.

## From JB Miller;



*I have been asked by my friend Rick Land to write something like "The Fraser Connection". For those of you old enough (I'm in my 70's) this may conjure up memories of Gene Hackman rampaging for his life through the Paris streets in the movie, French Connection. Well, I'm not Gene and I didn't play him on TV either.*

*But, I did ride Observed Trials in the early 70's through the 80's. It was 1973 and I had successfully survived my 4 years of service in the Army, actually Army Security Agency. While in Okinawa I got the dirt bike bug and bought the local bike of choice, a Yamaha DT-1. The upshot of that played out like one of those "B" movies about dealing drugs in the inner city. "Hey kids, the first one's free"! After successfully figuring out how to ship my DT-1 back to the states, I used APO courtesy of the US Army, in custom crates hand made by the Okinawa carpenters. Back in the "World", I caught the trials bug. The idea of trying to get the motorcycle through or over THAT?? Sometime in that next year or so, Mick Andrews came to Kansas City. I, we, were mesmerized. He could actually spirit that Ossa up anything! It was around that time I think, that I met Mike McCabe. He was older, better, smoother...definitely smoother than any rider I had seen. Then, there was his Bultaco. Immaculate, perfect, tricked out, intimidating and appropriately as smooth as Mike. I wanted to be half that good. I*

*already had an old Sherpa-T 250 but jeez, it didn't have all those McCabe touches. Like the Allen bolts, the polish, the Renthal bars. I had sloppy Spanish. Mike has SMOOTH, SLICK Spanish.*

*The years and trials events came and went. And, by some kind of crazy osmosis, I learned enough to try to keep up in trials. I had the honor and pleasure to see and ride with Mike at places like Bixby, Pepsi Hill and John Zink Ranch. He was always the gentleman, and of course, SMOOTH.*

*As we all got older and now into the 1980's, I got interested in racing Hobie Cat sailboats. Trials was still an important part of my limited recreational time. We hosted a couple of Nationals and I got an introduction to what you could do by combining a corporate powerhouse (Honda) and an amazing young rider (Whaley). Besides, I was tired of cleaning the Bultaco brakes, and cleaning the points, then cleaning the brakes (did I mention that)?*

*I bought a used 1976 TL-250 that was Box stock, heavy, crappy frame like something that barely escaped the crusher at the Mitsubishi truck factory. I liked the 4 stroke, and I desperately wanted that factory Honda, you know the one made from "unobtanium".*





*I couldn't have that but I did have a friend who had connections in the trials world. I called Mike McCabe. A few weeks later, I was fitting the TL-250 into the Fraser frame. Thanks to Mike, I had a shot at actually competing on a Honda. I loved that machine, and it didn't fail me. It was better than I was and it would handle!*

*I rode that bike for years until I found that I really liked the sailing. Trials gave way to trips to the Hobie Nationals and an appropriate schooling by the Aussies and the Californians. So the time came for me to pass on the Honda/Fraser. There was this one younger, enthusiastic rider that I witnessed growing up. He survived my incessant teasing, and was a great now man, who loved the classic trials stuff. I had witnessed Rick learn, grow and become a father, veteran and a talented man with his hands. The Fraser had to have a new home. Thank goodness, it is where it was destined to be.*

### Ok, I'm back now...

Thanks to JB for giving us some background on his riding and his relationship with Mike McCabe. John mentioned how smooth Mikes riding style was? Well it rubbed off, JB was a super smooth rider as well and my riding style today is a reflection from what I learned from JB all those years ago. I learned from JB very quickly that smoothness pays off...my Dad used to tell me, watch how "Old Smoothy (JB)" does it, and I did!



Ok, back to the Honda Fraser! I remember being at a monthly event back in 1980-81 at the old MATT Quarry and JB showing up with the Honda Fraser. It was really trick! JB let me ride it around, I was impressed at how well it turned and the suspension was really plush and the four stroke motor thumping along was the cherry on top! It was as close as a mere mortal could get to a factory Honda without the "unobtainium" of course. JB finally had his "Trick" Honda ride, and ride it well he did! Shortly after that I joined the Military and moved to Wichita, JB was off sailing his Hobie Cat and our paths didn't cross again for another thirty or so years.

My Dad used to follow us around back in the 70s shooting movies of us riding trials. I got these old movies from my Dad back about 2013 or so and had them converted over to a digital format. Once I had them done I started dispersing copies to all my old riding buddies from back in the day from when these were shot. JB came to mind as he was in several of them and with the help of some of the MATT guys I was able to get in touch with JB and get him a copy of the videos. Our friendship picked up where it had left off so long ago. It was so great to be in touch with him again and also to hear through him how some of the other riders we spent time with back then were doing now.

During our visits JB mentioned he still had the Fraser Honda, which was great to hear since so many of our old bikes just disappear through the years never to be found again. JB and I visited and kept in touch the next couple of years, I got him spooled up on my kids and grandkids and how they are now involved in trials. One day he asked me if I would like to take possession of the Fraser Honda. To say the least I was stunned and honored. He said he wanted it to be ridden and enjoyed. So one day Sherri and I made the trip up to John and Pam's house and after a great visit and lunch, came home with JB's Fraser in the back of my Truck.



It was a time capsule, straight out of 1981 right down to the Pirelli Rear and Dunlop front tires, which anyone from those days knew that was the hot setup back then. I brought the Fraser home, gave it a bath and started studying it, trying to decide if it should be left as it was or if it was fitting of something else?

After about a year and a lot of brain cells burned up I finally figured out what I wanted to do to honor JB and his Fraser. First off was a total tear down including the engine, clean everything, replace anything out of tolerance and put it all back together. I can't explain how much fun it was to find some piece of mud stuck somewhere and think that it came from the old MATT Quarry back in the early 80s

As I went all through the engine, installing a new set of rings as the piston was still in limits, I thought about how this old bike needed one more tie with the NEOTT club. A quick message to Jon Stoodley (1) and he was willing and ready to work the head and valves of the Fraser over to make her run better than she ever had. Jon worked his magic and I had the head back in no time and finished the motor assembly. Before installing the motor I polished the Chrome plated aluminum frame.

Looking at that beautiful frame I knew there needed to be some more "Bling" to this bike, so while the forks were apart I polished the fork legs and triple clamps. It was all starting to come together, looking really special, but I was still stumped on how to paint it.

As I bolted the engine in the frame and installed the forks, shocks and wheels, I started looking at the original Fraser side panels that were on the bike and started thinking Red. Then the words JB told me, about how he was impressed with the Factory Hondas of the day and how he wanted one, made it all come together in my mind. The bikes ridden by the Factory guys in the late 70s to early 80s were Red, like Eddy Lejeunes bike...that was it, make JB's bike look like the factory bikes he saw that had inspired him to build his Fraser. So that was it, Honda Racing Red, Red fenders, lots of polished aluminum and chrome. I hoped this would be something JB would approve of, I would soon find out.







I finished the bike in 2017 just in time to take it up to the Quarry Cup where JB would meet me for the reunion of him and his Fraser. It was truly a special reunion at that, JB seeing his old bike again but all new, like just rolling off the showroom floor. It was all worth it to watch him looking over his bike. I could tell he approved, we got to take some photos of him on his Honda and I on my Yamaha side-by-side again.





So there you have it, the story of how two friends, JB and Mike McCabe, worked together to make a special bike come together. And how I have known the basis for this bike from new until its Fraser conversion have now been able to complete the project and to bring this great bike back out to see competition again.

My plans were to reintroduce it to competition at the 2018 Quarry Cup but an injury kept me sidelined for this event. So hopefully next year or maybe sooner, who knows? I want to thank JB for letting me work his Fraser and take care of it for him. Also a big thank you to JB and Mike McCabe for what they did for the sport so many years ago. Last but not least, to my friend Jon Stoodley for making a special bike even more special with his skilled engine work. I had to personalize the Fraser tank with JB's nickname from back when a young kid on a Yamaha rode against the great Wil E. Everdab.

So there you have it, the story of JB's Fraser and its' ties with the NEOTT club.

Rick "Brand X" Land

April 19, 2019 Update: A couple of videos of the bike in action.



Footnotes:

(1) Jon Stoodley: "It was interesting to work on the four-stroke Honda Trials engine. The porting, cam and valve profile design are based on the street-type engine so I wanted to do a lot of small changes to make it more suitable for Trials usage.

*Rick and I constantly collaborate on engines and bikes and Rick often sends me engine parts for modifications. When I send them back, he goes over them with a fine tooth comb and has a bunch of technical questions which I, of course, really enjoy answering. He can pick up quickly on the "how" I design modifications due to his background but he also wants to know "why" I did what I did and we get into some really fun hard-core geeky conversations involving science and physics.*

*I love working with Rick, he has a great deal of experience, is a true craftsman and is one of the few people that is as curious as I am!"*

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