

T. E. LAWRENCE'S BROUGH SUPERIOR SS100

Lawrence of Arabia's Last Ride

David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* dedicates over three hours to gorgeously shot vistas and desert landscapes while depicting T. E. Lawrence's epic exploits as a lieutenant during World War I, but the 1962 film begins on a personal note. During the opening credits, Lawrence's character, played by Peter O'Toole, quietly prepares his Brough Superior SS100 for a ride. Kick-starting the fierce soundtrack of the 998-cc V-twin JAP motor, Lawrence accelerates and becomes at one with his machine and the road. The scene is an understated introduction to the enigmatic military and literary icon who became famous for aiding the British cause by coordinating Arab revolts in the Middle East. After the war, as he settled into civilian life, Lawrence became increasingly passionate about the meditative practice of enjoying fast motorcycles in the idyllic British countryside.

"A skittish motor bike with a touch of blood in it," Lawrence wrote in *The Road*, his treatise on the speed and satisfaction derived from

Opposite: T. E. Lawrence astride *George VII*, the Brough Superior on which he would experience his fatal crash.



T. E. Lawrence developed a reputation for being able to assimilate with Middle Eastern forces during World War I by dressing indigenously.



motorcycling, “is better than all the riding animals on earth, because of its logical extension of our faculties, and the hint, the provocations, to excess conferred by its honeyed, untiring smoothness.” Brough Superior, Lawrence’s bike of choice, boasted an amalgamation of the best parts available at any cost and used the tagline “The Rolls-Royces of Motorcycles” in its ads, a claim that went uncontested from the notoriously sensitive carmaker. Lawrence’s love affair with the brand began in 1922 with the purchase of his first Brough Superior, a Mark 1 model nicknamed *George I* (his subsequent Broughs would be named *George II*, *George III*, etc). Lawrence would eventually buy a total of seven Broughs, referring to them all as “Boanerges” (or “Boa”), a name of Biblical origin that means “sons of thunder.” The impetuous nickname referred to the bikes’ high-strung temperament, and during the latter portion of Lawrence’s life, the bikes offered him a visceral form of escape, simultaneously feeding his imagination and satisfying his wanderlust.



A front view of *George VII*. Lawrence’s goggles are wrapped around the windscreen.

Lawrence’s first bike was purchased following the publication of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and it cemented an addiction that would seal his untimely fate with *George VII*, a Brough Superior SS100 that he obtained in 1932 at the cost of £170. As with all Brough Superiors, Lawrence’s last bike was bespoke, fitted to his 5-foot, 5½-inch frame. SS100 models were each personally certified by George Brough to be capable of 100 miles per hour, and Lawrence—a connoisseur of velocity as well as style—wrote a letter of appreciation to Brough in September 1926: “Yesterday I completed 100,000 miles, since 1922, on five successive Brough Superiors . . . thank you for the road-pleasure I have got out of them . . . your present machines are as fast and reliable as express trains, and the greatest fun in the world to drive: and I say this after twenty years experience of cycles and cars.” In Lawrence’s estimation, he often logged 500 miles a day—and sometimes 700—on his Brough, traversing back roads solely for the pleasure of riding, if nothing else.

George VII—T. E. Lawrence’s seventh and final motorcycle, engine number 22000/S, frame number 1041.S—was ridden regularly and outfitted with some of the best equipment of its time, including a Bentley & Draper rear suspension system and Castle Brampton front forks. In another letter to Brough, Lawrence—under the pseudonym of T. E. Shaw (a moniker he morphed from his friend George Bernard Shaw)—wrote of his Boa, “It is the silkiest thing I have ever ridden: partly because of the perfect tune, partly from the high gear . . . I think this is going to be a very excellent bike. The crowds that gape at her, just now, will stop looking after she gets dirty . . . I am very grateful to you and everybody for the care taken to make her perfect.”

After clocking over 25,000 miles on his Brough, on May 13, 1935, Lawrence was riding through Egdon Heath from Bovington Army Camp in Dorset toward his Clouds Hill cottage when he collided with a bicycle being ridden by Burt Hargreaves, who was riding alongside his



After T. E. Lawrence's accident, his Brough Superior was stored at the service bay on the right.

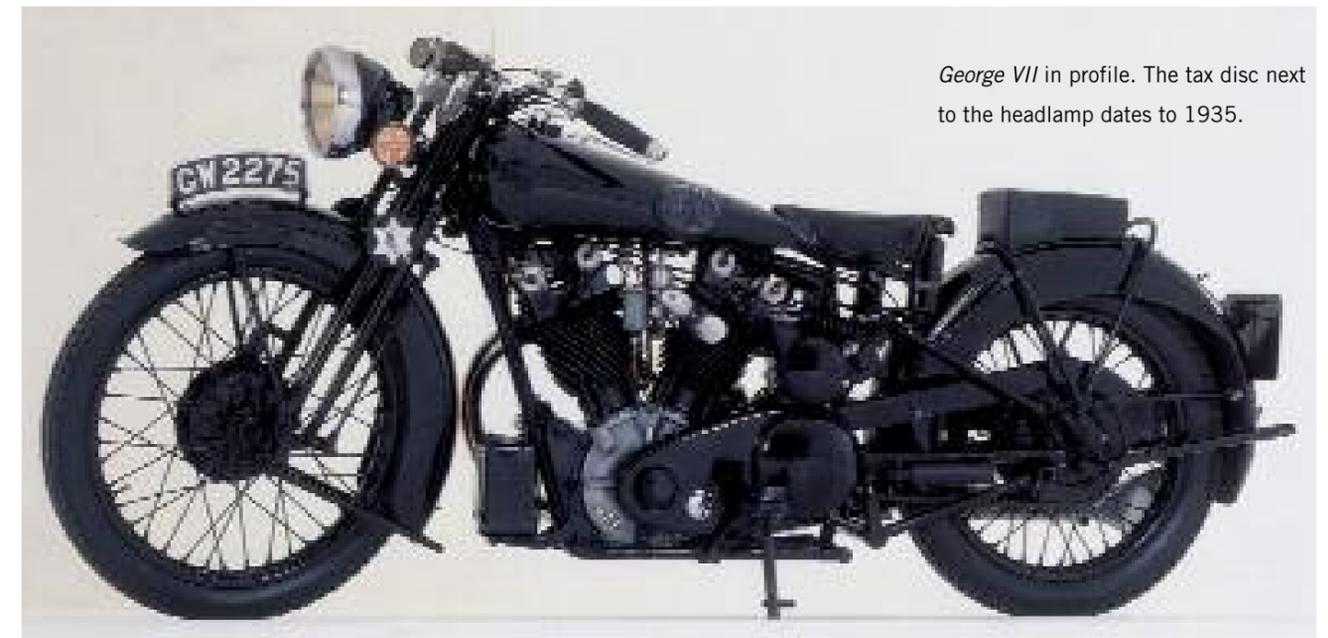
friend. Lawrence, having been thrown from his motorcycle, suffered a 9-inch gash to his head and lay bleeding by the side of the road until he was picked up by an army truck. He was comatose for six days at Bovington Camp Hospital before succumbing to his injuries on May 19, 1935.

On May 21, the day of Lawrence's funeral, coroner Ralph Neville Jones held an inquest and examined the damaged Brough. A few of his findings contradicted the depiction of the crash in the opening sequence of *Lawrence of Arabia*; based on the damage to the motorcycle and the bicycle, it appeared the cyclists were traveling in the same direction as Lawrence (the film portrays them as riding toward him). Also, the damage to the bicycle's rear wheel suggests that the bike was turning during the moment of impact, which is contrary to the boys' sworn statements—they



Burt Hargreaves' bicycle, which was struck by Lawrence's motorcycle.

T. E. Lawrence's Brough Superior was held as evidence for the coroner's inquest and is seen here on a Ford Model T on May 21, 1935, the day of Lawrence's funeral. Note the visible license plate.



George VII in profile. The tax disc next to the headlamp dates to 1935.

said they were traveling single file, straight down the road. Additionally, the registration number on the motorcycle in the film, UL 656, was actually that of *George VI*, the bike that preceded Lawrence's final bike, the plates of which actually read GW 2275.

After the accident, the motorcycle was stored for three months at the garage where it had been serviced. Lawrence's brother Arnold declined George Brough's offer to rebuild the damaged motorcycle for £40—a considerable amount in 1935—choosing instead to sell the bike back to him. The damage to the motorcycle included a bent kick-starter and footpegs, a grazed saddle, the loss of the headlamp rim, and a dent in the fuel tank from the impacted shift lever. The stainless-steel tank, which T. E. Lawrence had replaced three months prior to the accident, was refitted by Brough with a traditional chromium-plated tank and painted black by a subsequent owner. To this day, traces of damage to the handlebar and the front mudguard remain visible. George Brough would eventually sell the mostly repaired motorcycle to a Cambridge dealership, which placed the bike in its window display for publicity.

T. E. Lawrence's final Brough Superior eventually traded hands until it found its seventh and current owner. The owner, who wishes not to be identified, is the first person since Lawrence to own all the memorabilia associated with the motorcycle, including Lawrence's goggles, the bike's original log book, its 1935 tax disc (indicating that it was paid up for road use), and a pair of brass fuel filters (with Lawrence's currency still inside).

Arguably the most famous road-going motorcycle of all time, T. E. Lawrence's last bike is currently on display at London's Imperial War Museum and exists as the only surviving motorcycle that can be positively identified as his. In contrast to the heroic military campaigns in which T. E. Lawrence seemed impervious to harm, the 1932 Brough Superior SS100 speaks as much to his enthusiasm for riding as it does to his fragile mortality.



Peter O'Toole astride T. E. Lawrence's last bike. O'Toole's performance in *Lawrence of Arabia* launched his career.



ELVIS PRESLEY'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON ELECTRA-GLIDE

A Ride Fit for the King

Born in a tiny house in Tupelo, Mississippi, to a truck driver and a seamstress, The King grew up in conditions that were anything but regal. Elvis Aaron Presley was deprived of life's luxuries, but those limitations would become a hidden blessing. At the age of 11, when his wish for a bicycle went unfulfilled, his mother gave him a \$13 guitar instead. This gift triggered an awakening of Elvis' innate singing talent, and he signed with Sun Records in 1955.

Presley became a motorcycle enthusiast as soon as his finances permitted. Upon earning his first advance from Sun Records, he purchased a 125-cc Harley Hummer, which was maintained by local mechanic and future tuner Jerry Branch. When Presley earned a bonus for switching to RCA Records, he graduated from the diminutive Hummer to a larger, 883-cc 1956 Harley-Davidson Model K. His reputation as a dyed-in-the-wool Hog fan became established when he and the bike appeared on the May 1956 cover of the Harley-Davidson publication *Enthusiast*.

Opposite: Elvis, in what appears to be a moment of contemplation, was actually looking into the empty fuel tank of his 1956 Harley-Davidson Model K. © Alfred Wertheimer/photokunst



Elvis' 1976 Harley-Davidson Electra-Glide typified his taste in motorcycles; it was large, commanding, and low to the ground.

As Elvis' blues-influenced rock 'n' roll exploded in popularity, he became notorious for scandalously suggestive onstage gyrations. His moves were so controversial that cameramen were instructed to frame him from the waist up when he appeared on Ed Sullivan's "Talk of the Town" TV show. An insinuation of rebelliousness became part of his public persona, but film studios were skittish about featuring protagonists with an unsavory edge. So in the 1964 Paramount Pictures release *Roustabout*, Elvis rode an innocuous Honda 350 Superhawk, a choice which sought to place him in the demographic idealized by the manufacturer's famous slogan: "You meet the nicest people on a Honda." While Triumphs and Hondas would eventually share garage space with his Harleys, it was the American brand that would remain synonymous with Elvis' charismatic personality. Though his career slowed during the mid-1960s, the black leathers Elvis wore during his 1968 comeback concert recalled the bad-boy image sported by Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* and reasserted Presley's authentic style.

As his career grew, Elvis' enthusiasm for motorcycles and cars proved unselfish; he often bestowed friends, family, and business associates with two- and four-wheeled gifts. His local entourage—known as the "Memphis Mafia"—were frequent recipients of his generosity, and they enjoyed riding with Presley regardless of weather or time of day. His choice in bikes was independent of their cost, as Memphis Mafia member Joe Esposito describes it: "It didn't matter if it cost a million dollars and another cost a dime," he explained. "If he liked it, he would pick the one that cost a dime." Though Presley's tastes ran the gamut, he had a soft spot for traditional Harley-Davidson dressers. "He loved Harleys that were big and close to the ground," explains Ron Elliot, who maintained Elvis' fleet of bikes.

Presley's bike purchases were often impulsive, as evidenced by a certain Harley-Davidson Electra-Glide. Following a series of concerts in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in August 1976, he stopped in Memphis before heading to his Palm Springs home. While in Palm Springs, he purchased a 1976 Electra-Glide on August 11 and headed to San Antonio, Texas, on August 26 for more performances. The Harley was painted Elvis blue with stenciled gear sprockets, creating a subtle pattern on the saddlebags and tank.

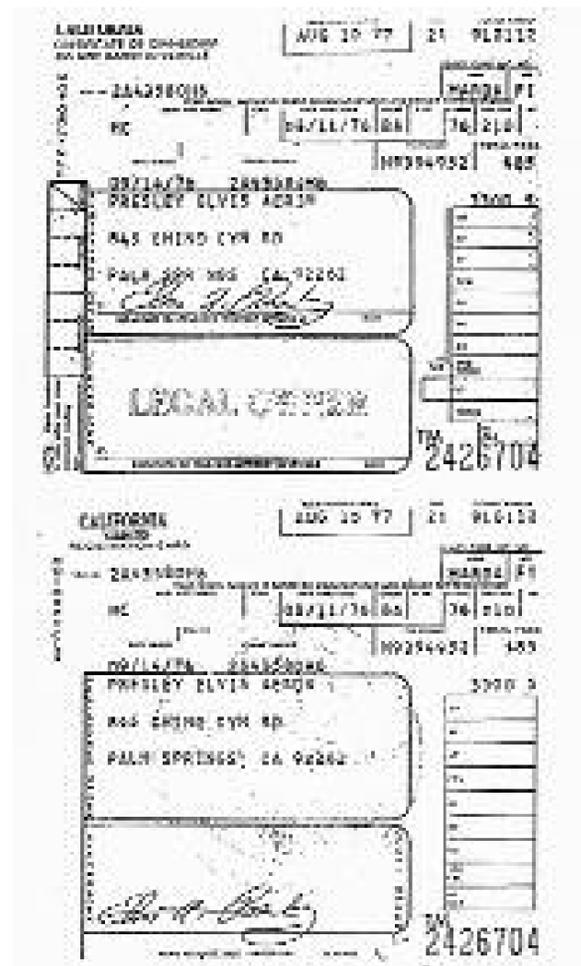
During the 1970s, Elvis' career would peak and begin a steady decline. He experienced depression following his divorce from Priscilla Presley. His global stardom enabled him to fulfill every stereotype of rock star excess, and he battled an addiction to prescription drugs, struggled with weight gain, and suffered from spiraling health problems. Nonetheless, he toured heavily and, between 1968 and 1977, put in over 1,100 performances, most of which were before sold-out audiences.

The Harley's 1,200-cc V-twin produces massive torque.

The Electra-Glide's paint features a unique pattern created by the use of gear sprockets as stencils.



A copy of the DMV registration attributing the bike to Elvis Presley.



While Elvis Presley's career ebbed and flowed—going into and out of varying degrees of revolution, trend setting, and alternatively stasis and hibernation—motorcycles were a constant fixture. A symbol of escape, freedom, and ultimate independence, in many ways, bikes represented to Elvis the same qualities his music represented to a generation.

The blue Electra-Glide Elvis purchased in August 1976 is one of the rare Elvis-owned motorcycles not on display at Graceland, and few details are known about its history. David Geisler, a collector who operates the Pioneer Auto Show in Murdo, South Dakota, traded several cars for Elvis' Harley in 1982. The bike is currently on display there among over 250 vintage cars and motorcycles.

The bikes on permanent display in Graceland include a 1966 Harley chopper, a 1976 Electra-Glide 1200 Liberty, a Bicentennial Edition 1976 Electra-Glide, and a 1965 Honda Dream. It is a testament to the motorcycle culture perpetuated by Elvis' legacy that, in 2007, a Harley-Davidson dealership opened at the Graceland visitor center.

As homegrown as the Harleys he rode, Elvis combined defiance with charming accessibility. This concept of accessible rebelliousness redefined not only what the public accepted but what it considered American.



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JOHN BRITTEN'S

BRITTEN V-1000

The Modern Masterpiece

For insight into the outlandishly sculpted, shockingly innovative Britten V-1000 race bike, one must consider the brief life and times of John Britten, the mind behind the motorcycle.

The seeds of Britten's gifts were visible early on; as a kid with a talent for tinkering, he improvised the construction of go-karts, and by age 13, he and a friend had restored an abandoned Indian Scout.

In spite of his dyslexia, Britten enrolled in a mechanical engineering course after attending St. Andrew's College, working as a draftsman before designing a highway project in England. Though the work was well suited to his technical proficiency, Britten's career took a turn in 1976 when, at the age of 26, he shifted his focus to fine art. Newly committed to crafting handmade glass lighting fixtures, he indulged deeply in his creativity, which had previously taken a back seat to nuts-and-bolts

Opposite: The Britten V-1000's unmistakable stance resembles no other bike. Its unique pink-and-blue paint job was inspired by the colors of a starfish-shaped piece of handblown glass Britten brought from Australia.



Two views of Andrew Stroud riding the Britten V-1000 at Mt. Panorama circuit in Bathurst, Australia.
Roderick Eime



practicality. “You’re more likely to succeed if you choose what you want to design,” Britten would later say, recalling the individualist attitude that would become an overarching theme of his work.

Concurrent with his budding creativity was a burgeoning passion for racing motorcycles. In 1986, Britten started with a bevel-drive Ducati Darmah racer—a bike that exuded personality but lacked reliability—and began with some simple improvements. For the person who successfully converted a neglected Victorian-style stable into an art nouveau-inspired home, building a better bike seemed eminently feasible.



National pride is integrated into the Britten’s design: four red stars on the Britten’s blue tank reference the New Zealand flag.

Britten began tweaking the Ducati powerplant, but his pet project eventually morphed into a trellis-framed, Denco-powered methanol burner sporting a fabricated aluminum swingarm. The radical mechanical makeover was housed in a handmade carbon-fiber monocoque chassis wrapped in sleek, aerodynamically slippery bodywork. The iterations of the bikes—which would later be referred to as the AERO-D-Zero and the AERO-D-One—ended up winning the 1987 BEARS (British, European, American Racing Series) speed trials, clocking at 148.21 miles per hour.

Eager to improve upon the AERO series, Britten set out to build an even more advanced race bike using state-of-the-art techniques such as hand-forming carbon fiber, as well as a few primitive but inventive ones (including baking a prototype 1000-cc V-twin powerplant in a backyard kiln.)

Industrial designer Shaun Craill would later say of Britten, “He didn’t understand he was being unconventional because he hadn’t been taught what conventional design was.” The exuberance of Britten’s unfettered creativity was made shockingly clear with his new creation, the V-1000. Wild, futuristic, and dynamic, the bike’s design merged hand-crafted carbon-fiber/Kevlar composite bodywork, which incorporated Britten’s unique “skin and bones” construction technique, with the stunning beauty of its exposed mechanical workings. From the ground up, the bike represented Britten’s vision of an uncompromising racer.

Without the extensive bodywork of his earlier bikes (which hampered access to the engine), the V-1000 gains its aerodynamic advantage by minimizing frontal surface area. The V-twin configuration was chosen for its relatively narrow profile (thereby reducing drag), and the powerplant is preceded with a fairing possessing two thin, horizontal slits routing air to an under-seat radiator (again, minimizing frontal surface area).

Because it lacks a conventional frame, the bike’s innards appear to be suspended midair. Incorporating a novel setup in

In keeping with the bike’s sparse functionality, the V-1000 seat consists of two small pads fitted snugly within the bodywork.





The V-1000's aluminum exhaust silencers produce a deep but muted bass sound, and its underseat radiator is notorious for heating up the thin seat.

which the tops of the cylinders are connected to the saddle via a beam, the V-1000's structure centers around the engine—both figuratively and literally. The rear suspension is mounted to the front of the engine via a carbon-fiber swingarm with an adjustable linkage, and the front forks are of a girder-style carbon construction, seemingly retro in form but in fact quite modern in function. Lighter than traditional upside-down telescopic forks, Britten's girder design combats brake dive without completely eliminating feel, allowing for some compression during braking. Adjustable mounts enable relatively soft spring and damping, while permitting control over rake, trail, and wishbone settings. In Britten's words, the setup is "a girder parallelogram, semi-intelligent front suspension, which is much more sophisticated than a conventional motorbike in that it can differentiate between a brake or a bump force."

While the V-1000's components are remarkably lightweight, the sand-cast aluminum-alloy engine case is relatively heavy due to its role as a central stressed unit. Developed with the assistance of renowned tuner Jerry Branch, the V-1000 powerplant cantilevers pressure created by high g-force riding and is engineered to perform reliably against the brutal rigors of racing (though its high tolerances and tremendous piston velocities require the engine to be disassembled and inspected after five cumulative hours of running). The cylinders of Britten's liquid-cooled V-1000 powerplant are configured at 60 degrees, fed by two sequential Bosch fuel injectors per cylinder that can be tuned with a laptop computer. The engine is blueprinted so well that it produces a silky-smooth 165 horsepower at 12,400 rpm without the aid of counterbalancers.

By 1991, John Britten's underdog motorcycle hit the circuits and scored an amazing second and third against factory machines at Daytona's Battle of the Twins competition. At Daytona in 1992, Andrew Stroud, riding a V-1000, egged Ducati rider Pascal Picotte on with wheelstands and passes, until a crossed battery wire forced him to fall behind in the second-to-last lap. Britten would later lament that it "serve[d] him right for using a Ducati part," a statement that reinforced his homegrown, do-it-yourself attitude.

The V-1000 would go on to set world speed and acceleration records and win numerous races, emerging victorious in 1995's BEARS. More significant, however, was the singular



John Britten experimented with different handmade exhaust routings, and Virgil Elings' bike features a less convoluted version.

vision with which the bike was conceived and executed. Essentially the first prototype motorcycle to achieve consistent race success, the V-1000 could not have come to fruition without the ambitious vision of its creator. Britten seemed to lack limitations—both creatively and inspirationally—that might prevent him from achieving a functionally superior and aesthetically beautiful race bike. His brilliant career came to a sudden halt, however, when, shortly after his 45th birthday, Britten died of melanoma. While six V-1000s were completed during his lifetime, his vision of building a total of 10 V-1000 motorcycles would be completed posthumously, and the final bike was shipped in February 1999, four years after his death.

The last Britten was owned by Michael Iannuccilli of Las Vegas until it was sold to Virgil Elings, who displays it at his Vintage Motorcycle Museum in Solvang, California. The bike—which spent most of its life crated (with the exception of a ride by Jason McEwan at a Britten memorial event)—was never raced. It was delivered to Mr. Elings on brand-new slicks and lapped by him at Willow Springs, where he reached 10,000 rpm in top gear on the track's notoriously fast straightaway. Elings recalls thinking, "Don't. Even. Do. This," as he approached terminal velocity.

A rare example of functionality married with beauty, the V-1000 is widely considered one of the great landmark race motorcycles of the twentieth century. The arc of John Britten's life may have been short, but as evidenced by the V-1000—his groundbreaking masterpiece—it was touched with a gift of exceptional brilliance.



Lightweight but strong carbon fiber was incorporated liberally throughout the bike, including the swingarm and the wheels.