How To Keep Them Alive And Well In The '90s

It won't take much to get you hooked on restoring an old bike. Usually, all it takes is seeing a likely candidate sitting in somebody's driveway during a garage sale at a price you can't resist. Heck, I once bought a Puch 175 just because the owner sold it for a mere forty bucks, even though it spent the next five years sitting out in my back yard under a tarp. Vintage bike restoration and racing are hot stuff right now. In fact, there are numerous organizations around the country that concentrate on vintage competition. And it seems that an overwhelming majority of tracks now have a vintage class.

Why not? Vintage racing is affordable, fun and brings back some good memories for the old coots while letting younger riders enjoy a piece of history.

If you're simply going to restore a bike and make it some sort of showpiece to put on display, then this article is not for you. However, if you are going to ride or race your "new" vintage bike, then this article is MUST READING, unless you have been around about 200 years or so, like I have.

MAINSTREAM VINTAGE BIKES
Mostly due to space limitations here, we will avoid weird off-brands, obscure Italian bikes, early four-strokes, and bikes with short model runs. In other words, if you want to see hot setups on a Rokon, Ducati, Gilera, Benneli, Bridgestone, Panther, Yankee, Sears, Aermacchi (H-D), American Eagle, Steens, Carabella, Puch, trials bikes, mini-bikes, and other miscellany, you will have to look elsewhere.

We will cover the CZ and Maico here, and play it by ear on what tips you want in the future. In other words, if you want an article on the Spanish motocrossers or the Yamaha Dit One, drop a line to Old Bike Journal and let us know.

Tips will concentrate on strengthening weak areas, improving performance and handling, and increasing reliability. We will stay away from the area of modifications, hop-ups and such, in order to keep in the true spirit of vintage racing.

Remember the days when the starting lines were filled with CZs? This well-setup Chey-Zed had Koni shocks, a rubber band on the rear brake, a Mikuni carb, and an in-line fuel filter. Wow!
ADVICE THAT APPLIES TO MOST VINTAGE BIKES

- Get rid of old-style filters and find a modern foam or K&N filter than will fit. It's not that hard, if you hunt around a bit.

- Terry Cables are far superior to any of the stock control cables of the past, and the Hesperia, California, company has an amazing assortment that goes way back. Put your stock vintage cable in a plastic bag and store it.

- Forget running stock shocks. Even the best of them cannot compete to the cheapest Works Performance or Progressive shock offered. And good news! Gil, at Works, regularly builds shocks for virtually any vintage bike.

- Modern tires are available and are far superior in every respect to the knobbies of 20 years ago. If you can find an old Barum or something like that, spray it with Armor-All and store it.

- Use new-generation chain whenever possible.

- Always use at least Grade 8 bolts in all critical areas; even better, consider using some of the new super bolts, like the Foremost F-911 fasteners, which are equivalent to Grade 11.

- Do not re-use old bolts unless you must. Twenty-year-old nuts and bolts do lose strength.

Even when CZ went to the radial head, most of the other engine parts were still 10-year-old castings. Amazingly, the unchanged CZ remained popular until 1974, mostly because of its reliability.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR CZ HAPPY

- On all models, the air filter hold-down nut must be safety-wired or held in place with a rubber band. If you don’t do this, the nut will work loose and get ingested by the engine. Bad news, and even back in the ’70s, cases were $400-plus.

- Put a rubber band or a return spring on the rear break arm to assist the brake pedal to return quickly without sticking.

- Naturally, the stock Trial shocks must be replaced. Years ago, everybody ran 12.9-inch Konis, but today, a call to Works Performance will yield a good set of shocks that work better than any old Koni. Works recommends 13.75” to 14.25”-long shocks with a full four inches of travel, improved steering and better ground clearance to keep the pipe from getting crushed. You might have to put a small dent on the inside part of the pipe to let the lowered swingarm clear the pipe.

- An airbox from a 1972 (or newer) CZ will replace the old fiberglass air box that disintegrated easily.

- Drill out the float inlet in the Jikov carb to prevent fuel starvation should you choose to run some Grand Prix-style events, where the engine will be revving a lot.

- You’ll probably be happier with a one-tooth smaller countershaft, as the CZs all have a very tall low gear and a close-ratio gear box.
The bike that dominated the big-bore MX class at all levels in the '70s was the Maico. If you knew the little inside tricks, the phrase “Maico-breako” did not apply to you.

- The stock clutch springs cannot take heat and should be replaced with anything modern you can find that will fit. Look around, and yes, you can grind the ends down a bit to get the correct length.
- Replace the smallish 2.75 front tire with a proper 3.00 x 21 item and the bike will work better in soft stuff and sand.
- Fork seals can be replaced with Honda seals from that era. Seal size is 35mm x 47mm, 7mm-thick. They take two seals per leg. You can also use a Kawasaki c/shaft seal that works great: it’s from a 125 Kawasaki single from the early '70s. That should be enough of a lead to find the part. Please don’t ask me for the part number, as I forgot it, but if you cannot chase it down, you deserve to have fork oil slobber all over you as you ride.
- Put stronger seven or eight-gauge spokes in the rear wheel if you plan to ride the bike hard. The stockers will break easily. Use a cross-four pattern for maximum strength.
- Replace the spark plug cap with something new that will resist water.
- Check the points often, as the phenolic block wears rapidly. You might hunt around for Motoplat electronic ignitions that fit.
- Every nut and bolt on the CZ should be Loctited or safety-wired. Spend extra time on the rear sprocket bolts and motor mounts.
- A folding shift lever is a must. If you have an old, rigid footpeg model, get some folding pegs on the bike before you ride it one inch. This is important, as those things are real ankle breakers and also hang up horribly in deep ruts, which you’ll find out if you share the track with modern bikes.
- Weld a small strip of angle iron on the bottom of the low pipe (earlier CZs had high pipes except for the rare twin-pipers) to keep it from getting crushed.
- You absolutely must keep the swingarm pivot properly oiled and lubricated. If you let it get dry, a “step” will wear in the pivot bolt, making swing removal nearly impossible. In fact, when buying a vintage CZ, this is the first area you should check!
- Do not run the oil/gas ratio too lean, or the timing-side main bearing will get loose on the crankshaft and then die. Run 20:1, just like in the old days.
- Use basic 50-weight mineral oil, i.e. Castrol, Honda, Silkolene, Spectro, etc., with at least 92-octane gas. If you’re going to run it real hard, add some race gas.

KEEPING YOUR MAICO ALIVE

“Maico-breako” became a taunting phrase of the '70s, but it was unearned. When properly set up, they were extremely reliable. But the weak point was the chain primary drive which caused most of the grief.
- The small clutch (harder pull) was superior in every way to the big clutch (easy pull), and should be used for racing.
- The Belleville washer clutch stack pieces should be checked regularly for wear. When there’s a large shiny area on the contact area, it’s time to replace ‘em.
- Use two single chains instead of the triplex chain for increased reliability in the left-side drive when using a three-row sprocket setup.
- Change the gear-box oil after every race and make sure you use a magnetic drain plug, which came with most models. If you can’t find one, many older Porsche engines use the same plug.
- Do not use the aluminum clutch plates. Stick with the heavier steel items.
- Check the primary drive sprocket for alignment against the driven clutch sprocket. When it’s nice and straight, you can expect a year of racing every weekend out of the left side. If it’s off, well, that’s how the phrase “Maico-breako” came about.
- Rear sprocket bolts are undersized and should be replaced with bigger items. Also, Loctite ‘em.
- Flip the rear brake arm down (under the swingarm) for a straighter brake-rod pull. The bent rod that goes around the shock gives a mushy feel.
- Clean the brake shoes and back plate (front and rear) after every race.
- Put a cotter pin on the air filter hold-down rod/nut.
- Pay particular attention to the air boot where it goes into the airbox. It can get loose and suck crud into the engine.
- Keep a fresh hose on the front of the carb and use good, fresh, wide hose clamps, or the heavy Bing carb can fall off when gas gets between the carb and boot.
- Beef-up the top motor-mount plate (the one that hooks to the head bolts) or it will break.
- Keep a very close eye on motor-mount bolts. Oversized bolts are a good idea for the bigger Maicos.
- Put a piece of rubber or plastic where the chain crosses the swingarm and replace it as the chain saws through it, or watch the chain saw through the swingarm itself.
- Get rid of the Magura kill button; it will fail on you, sooner or later.
- Keep grease on the mag rotor; if it gets dry, the phenolic block will start scoring the high spots and the chrome will lift off.
- You must drain the float bowl after each ride and blow out the pilot jet regularly.
- On the big Maicos, always use the compression release. Make sure that the release cable doesn’t come loose.