

Project Carabela

by Paul Parkinson

Carabela was a Mexican motorcycle company that made small bore motorcycles and mopeds (remember those things) for the Mexican and North American markets. For some reason when I was growing up I always wanted to have a Carabela MX bike. This was partially driven by the stylish look of Carabela's 1974 Marquesa MX bike but mostly driven by the possibility of owning a MX bike for less money. And I am sure that was a big part of the Carabela's marketing plan. However magazine reviews of the bike were not wonderful.

Jump ahead almost 30 years...

and for some reason I still have a desire to own a Carabela.

So, at Vintage Motorcycle Days this year I stumbled across a couple of 1977 Carabela MX bikes in the very last row of the swap meet. All of a sudden those early teenage dreams came back (NO not the dream about the blonde in the other row, the dream about the MX bike that would get the blondes attention). Acting slowly, in order to not tip off the seller, I asked how much? Whoa, too much! Ron Anachak's nagging about my always being willing to pay more than he would ever pay for a bike has made me learn to react this way to any price asked. Okay, nobody is going to snap up the bikes quickly so I can let the seller wait a bit.

Heading back later I adopted the "Ron Anachak" school of bidding; "Tactic #1 - FLASH CASH". So holding my crisp 100's, I make my offer — the older gentleman selling the bike counters — I hum and then offer an extra \$25. By the way, what is in the box with the bikes? Ron checked out the box while I chat with teh seller. Ron rumages around in teh box and then pulls out a new Motoplat ignition, spare pistons and some factory tools.

Ron starts waving his hands and giving me the thumbs up sign. (Of course Ron is careful to do this behind the seller, so not to give his excitement away. Ron is a true professional.) Okay maybe \$325. And then it strikes — buyers remorse! Oh well, I have to think about this some more. Wandering off, Ron starts ragging on me; "Man you almost gave that guy a heart attack! He looked like he had been waiting years for somebody to come along and buy his Carabelas. How could you walk away like that?" Simple I responded, "Unless it results in an article for the web site, I can't just buy things based on a whim or teenage dream." I need to get an article out of things I buy. Of course it didn't help that I had already spent a good amount of money buying up a number of service and part manuals for the MotoXmuseum's library.

Well a couple of restful hours sleeping in the tent allowed the creative juices to start flowing — Yes, yes I can see it now... "Project Carabela!". How to restore an obscure MX bike without any manuals or known sources of parts or knowledge. And I could tie in guys at Comnetic for help with the gaskets and Wiseco for help with some pistons. Yes, it could work!

Jumping forwards a couple of hours...

Ron and I are loading the bikes on the trailer.

Of course remorse set in again when it became apparent that the box of spare parts had an oversize piston/ring set and a bunch of gaskets. It almost looked like all the parts required to restore the motor were in the box. Although the box also had a lot of factory tools. Well, I rationalized it by telling myself I had to save the factory tools from being tossed. Now there is still enough missing for a good project article; so welcome to Project Carabela.

Project Carabela will document the restoration of a 1977 125cc Carabela Marquesa II. As part of the project, we will develop a manual to help others who may want to restore one of these Mexican MX bikes. We will also explore and document the history of this interesting North American make.

The project uses the two bikes purchased at the VMD swap meet. One bike is almost complete,



except for the front fender. It has been ridden but still has its original tires with plenty of knobs. The bike has been sitting outside for some time, evident from the rotted seat, rusted out exhaust pipe and rusty foot pegs. However, the fiberglass tank is in fine shape and the other parts are good enough to make a reasonable starting point.

The second bike is really a rolling frame and separate engine. The rolling frame is quite unique in that it is brand new. The tires still have nibs on the knobs and the finish on the forks and rims are very clean. The roller has obviously been used over time as a parts bike and picked down to just the rolling frame. It will make a good starting point to use for the restoration. The second motor is a bit of an unknown. It wasn't installed in the roller when we purchased it. The motor didn't turn over and showed evidence of having the top end removed at one time (loose head bolts).

So follow along as we start [Project Carabela](#).

Explore with us what can be done with a relatively obscure make of MX bike.

BIKE 1



BIKE 2





The starting point for Project Carabela



Close up of the 125cc engine. Hidden from view is the hole in the pipe from rust.



The bike is fairly complete except the front fender.



The aluminum parts show plenty of corrosion from outdoor exposure.



The finish on the forks is also flaking from outdoor exposure.



The shocks are rusted and seized.



The roller is in exceptional shape. The tire and forks are in perfect condition.



The rear shocks on the roller are seized but everything else is very clean.