

The Green Hornet  
(1956 BSA Gold Star)

Greenwood, Iowa, summer 1964

Anybody growing up in Los Angeles in the early 1960s who spent Friday nights at Ascot Park Speedway getting off on the highjinks of the BSA Wrecking Crew, knew that those guys had their pristine, trick Gold Stars, like those of Albert Gunter, r.i.p., and their slob Gold Stars, like Neil Keen's.

Neil "Peachtree" Keen, National No 10 – the 0 painted in the shape of a doughnut – liked playing head games. His beauties were never as raunchy as they seemed, and he was especially creative and witty about utilizing tools for an Incorrect Purpose (I.P.). Peach concocted the Green Hornet, an eight-year-old Gold Star roadracer equipped not with clip-on handlebars, but a full set of elephant tusk flattrack bars, and its throbbing, riffing heart wasn't standard Beezer pavement-issue, but a wild Ascot Park dirt-track cruncher with big Harmon & Collins camshafts. All in all, this was a typical Keenesque brew – fast but scary. And I forgot to add that it was clothed in a bulbous and ill-fitting streamlining off a Harley Hog that wasn't so much hornet green as gopher-guts green. Everything was I.P. out the butt.

Getting to pull the trigger on this mechanical masterpiece in a 50-mile national for sophomore professionals on the roadcourse of Greenwood, just outside Des Moines, was a scribbler-cum-racer: me. Another dose of I.P.

1964 was a very good year for me and that bitchen Green Hornet was the most "alive" scooter I ever threw a

leg over. But at Greenwood I developed a case of pre-race heebie-jeebies that was untreatable even by popping a pair of pills (still more I.P.) used as prescription by Peach's hot wayward spouse who suffered migraine headaches, and who'd recently flown the coup with a steeplechase TT acrobat.

The glitch was that it was raining. Straight down. And I was given to fantasizing that the Green Hornet's motor was the actual 'lunger Peach had used to take down Mooch Resweber at a classic Ascot 8-Mile National. Suppose I broke it? What could feel worse than detonating the artifact that had eaten Mooch-the-Master's lunch?

Not to worry. Drenching rain in the electronics parked us out on Greenwood's water-logged far end, but not before the Green Hornet had demonstrated that it had engine on a certain high-llama Matchless G50 which won.

The sun was shining the next weekend over in Illinois for the roadrace national at Meadowdale. But the jerks teching the bikes were the same fuss-budgets who, upon inspecting the Green Hornet at Greenwood, had called it terrible names and threatened to flunk it. Then I came smoking onto Meadowdale's Monza Wall at 100-plus, and the Green Hornet did something that slammed shut my sphincter. I doubted afterward if I could will myself to ever open its throttle all the way open again.

I didn't have to. During a preliminary sprint for the 250s, a Milwaukee Vibrator shorttracker cunningly rigged with big bars and clutch and brake lever on the same side (more I.P.), raced by The Man himself, Bart Markel, centerpunched Dan Haaby, the high-llama G50's celebrity rider.

Haaby's collarbone got well-snapped; I was called in as his emergency replacement in the amateur national. The G50 and I suffered a heartening loss to – you guessed

it – more I.P. A Hog KR off the dirt tracks, raced by a Markel protégé with an attitude named John Zwerican, did a number on us.

Peach took the 'Hornet home to California for the winter round of dirt nationals. First thing he did was fire me. Next he crap-canned the brakes, streamlining and other road racing I.P. and got a new and stone-cold triggerman called Don "The Assassin" Butler. He lived up to his nickname with a wide-open lap of the Sacramento Fairgrounds which terminated with a connecting rod ripping loose and the old Green Hornet's face getting blown off.