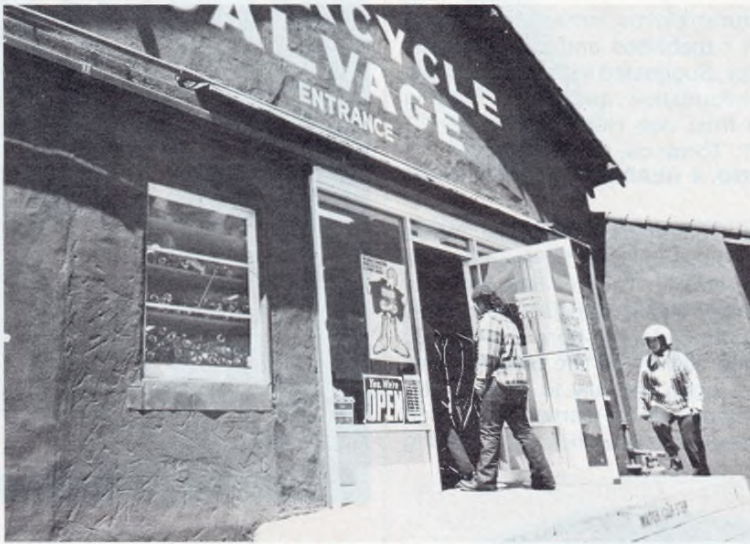


Uninitiated observers call them junkyards; those who run such places call them salvage yards. If Madison Avenue types named them, the world would have emporiums of pre-owned parts.

Call them whatever you like because we all know what's there.



Fences, Dogs and Parts Once Used

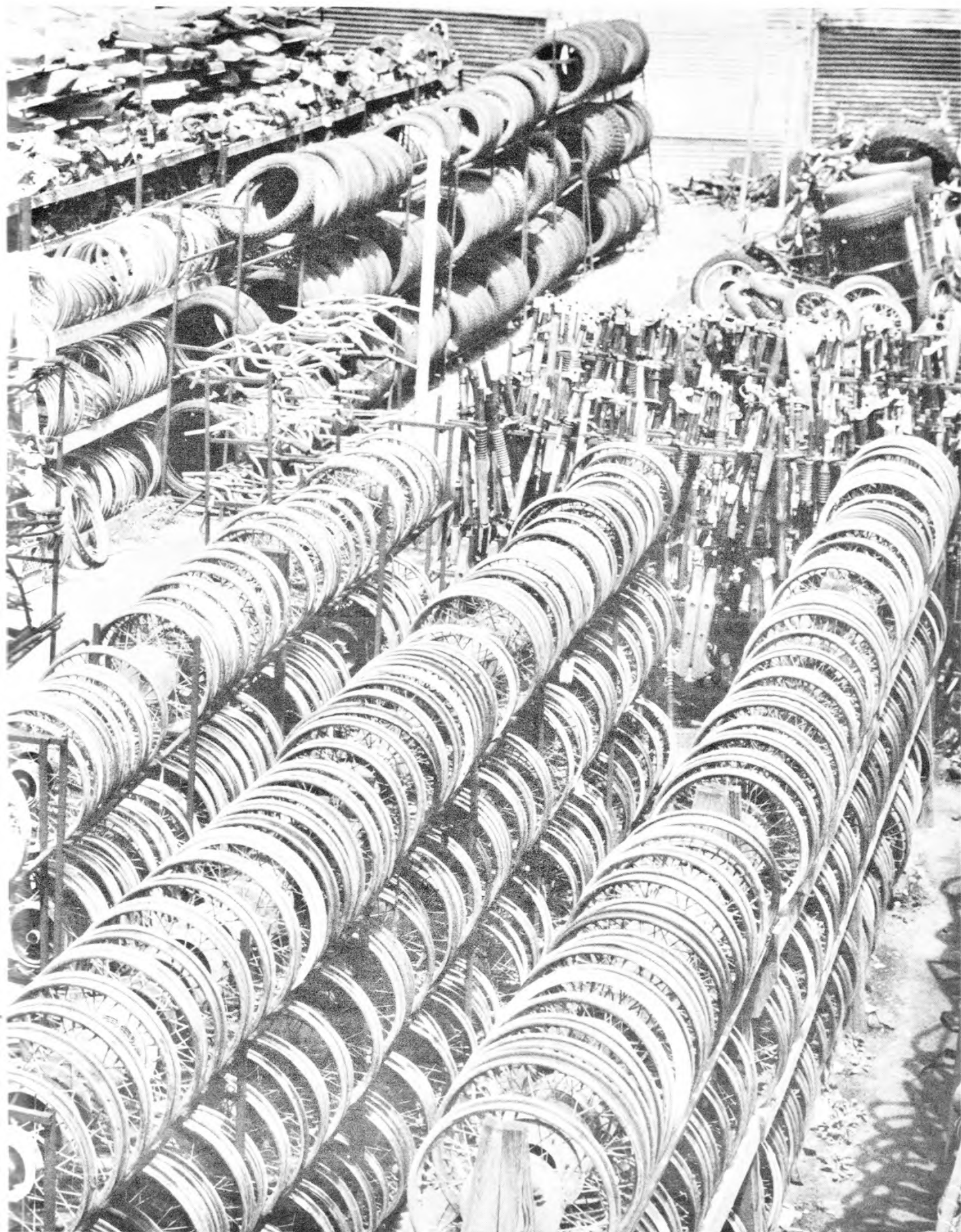
By Jess Thomas

● Suppose that you need a wheel hub for your Suzuki X-6 or an engine for the '49 Famous James you're restoring. The wheel hubs have been back-ordered from your friendly local Suzuki dealer for two months and the last anyone heard from the snarky old dude who used to be the James dealer was that he had been the focal point of a tremendous funeral. The answer to these and similar personal traumas for bike freaks may lie drowsing in the warm summer dirt at a local motorcycle salvage yard.

For the good old neighborhood junk yard, times have changed. The dog described in Jim Croce's bad man ballad reminds one of the days when a fellow could heft his tool box into a junk yard and remove an un-split radiator for his '51 Ford and walk back out the gate for ten bucks. But junk yards now are unfit for human eyes. Various local and na-



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tional ordinances have the yards surrounded by high, opaque fences. When you walk into one you face an experienced counter man who can look in his card file and tell you if he has what you need. The part will have been removed, at least superficially cleaned, and placed in a numbered bin. And it'll cost you half the retail price of a new part, plus tax. The yard employees work with high-speed pneumatic tools, often belong to unions with medical insurance and retirement programs, and their work environment is regulated by the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act. The term *junk* only enters the picture when the time comes for the salvage owners to tell the IRS what their inventory is worth. The situation hasn't reached the Cadillac stage yet, wherein junk parts might be called pre-owned components—but it isn't far off.

The motorcycle salvage yards range in nature between what the car yards used to be and what they are now. The bike bone-yards approach both extremes and many are venturing off into other sidelines and specialties. We visited three of the better known yards in the Southern California area to give you an idea of what motorcycle salvage yards are all about, and what you can expect when you first do business with them.

San Diego Motorcycle Salvage is owned and managed by a couple of the freest spirits you'll ever want to meet. Wade Killen dawdled through as much school as he could stand in a small Alabama town and applied to Harley-Davidson for a job. After a couple of years as an engineering draftsman and road racing weekends and vacations on his Sprint CR, Wade shucked the Wisconsin winters for the beach life in San Diego. While working as a mechanic in a local Honda shop to support his considerable racing habit Wade met Eric Marcus, a refugee of the Chicago auto junk yards and a bike freak who was teaching motorcycle mechanics at a trade school. A deal came up for the two to buy a lot of parts from a dealer that was going out of business, and San Diego Motorcycle Salvage sprung into business overnight. Wade still races in the AMA National Championship Road Races and Eric teaches motorcycle safety at San Diego State, works on his dune buggy and takes flying lessons. The SDMS "Team Junk" entry won the sweepstakes class in a recent benefit economy run with a step-through Honda 50, and took the little-wheel class with a Cushman scooter.

San Diego Motorcycle Salvage specializes in European dirt bike parts as well as the standard street models. Their particular sideline is completely reconditioned cylinders and heads with new parts on an exchange basis. They have a good machine shop. A Honda Japanese domestic model truck has been converted into a mini-wrecker, complete with an electric hoist actuated by a starter motor from a salvaged CB750.



Once a most prized possession and the first easy rider on the block, this old Suzuki slowly erodes.



A classic of tuning overkill: a BSA blivet tries to drive 500 cows through a two-cow gate.

Old West saddlery combines with dime-store shirt-pocket monogram on this old Harley seat.





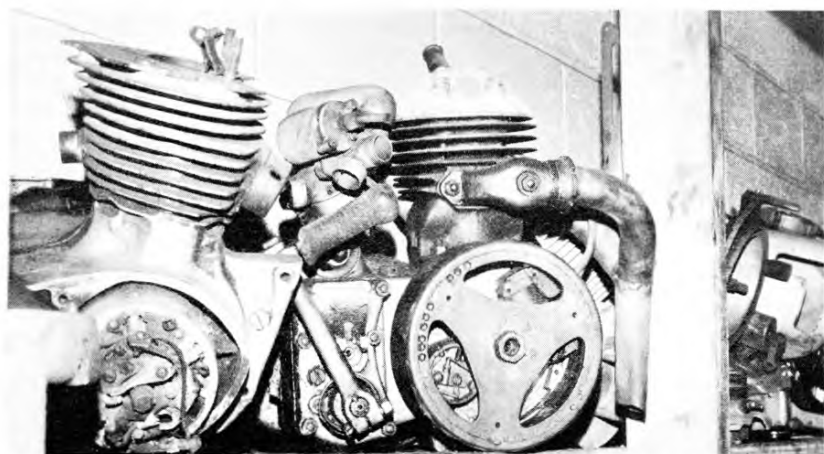
Eric Marcus (l) and Wade Killen started SDMS with a joint deal on old Vespa parts.



Double indemnity: old Triumph sprung hub on BSA swingarm.



Tiger Cub fender chronicles L.A. carpet baggers' trips to England.



Oldest Villiers two-stroke we ever saw next to H-D 125 at Motorcycle Salvage.

AUGUST 1974

As near as we could determine, the oldest bike yard in the country is Motorcycle Salvage, Inc. in Azusa, Ca. Bill Gross manages the yard with his assistants Edgar Cazares and Harvey Webster. In the Sixties, Gross says that he imported as much as 100,000 pounds of used parts from England in a single year. He still has a huge amount of older English parts, but the natural bulk of present business is with Japanese brands. In the front half of the salvage building, Gross operates the biggest helmet, boot, and accessory discount store we've ever seen. Leather pants and jackets for all kinds of bike sports cover a huge showroom. In an adjacent building, Gross' son and son-in-law operate a warehouse for their chain of motorcycle parts and accessory stores.

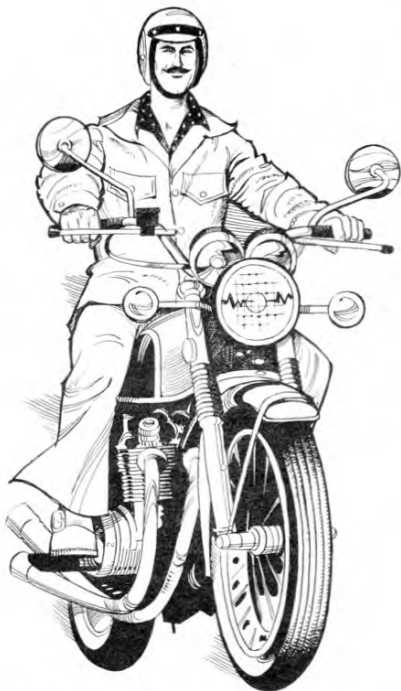
In nearby North Hollywood, the firm of Johnson and Wood has been selling salvaged parts since 1968, about half as long as Motorcycle Salvage. A few years ago, Woods tired of the business, sold out to partner Teddy Johnson and steamed off to India in pursuit of a ghuru, truth, and beauty. The salvage store continues under the management of Alan Butts. Besides the normal mounds of Triumph, BSA, H-D, Norton, and Italian parts, Butts also has a good stock of new Triumph components. All the fast-moving Japanese items are binned according to file numbers for quick service.

Johnson and Wood's sideline is the manufacture of specialty spoke kits. Ted Johnson supplies high-strength stainless steel replacements for all standard dirt bikes as well as specialty items like a set of spokes to adapt a 16-inch wide rim to a Honda CB-750 rear wheel. These kits and spokes, plus a custom wheel-building service are provided on the retail and mail order level at the salvage store.

The salvage end of all three of these yards operates almost identically. As bikes come in, the fast-moving items are removed and stored in indexed shelves. If a part is in good condition, the starting price is half the retail price of the new part from a retail dealer. The more items or the more complete assemblies a customer wants, the more likely he is to get a discount on the lot. From what we could see, good-natured haggling is the spice of life for the counter men. But woe unto the poor soul who insults the man by offering a ridiculous price. He'll pay exactly half of retail, or get kicked out of the store immediately.

The rarest and most expensive parts are for Harley-Davidson, Norton, the European dirt bikes and the Honda Fours. Suzuki bits are the cheapest at both retail and salvage prices. Complete engine assemblies range from about \$25 for a Honda 50 to more than \$500 for a mediocre 750 Four. Engines and parts used on professional racing machines, such as the Yamaha 650-750 twin, are particularly dear.

As we strolled among the treasures and trash in the three yards, distinct categories



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of human emotion were embodied in the resident machinery and the people who were drawn there by its tarnished light.

Heartbreak ruled the hulks. There was a 500 Kawasaki Triple with its top half completely burned off and barely a thousand miles on the gummy remains of its original tires. A 750 Triumph Trident cafe racer had been a sailor's sustaining pastime in the last month of a re-up hitch. Now it sprawled twisted, mag wheels shattered and fairing buckled, and with its forks packed crazily under the engine. An old foot locker yields the completely dismantled remains of an iron-barreled Triumph twin engine, complete save the timing gears which required a special puller that was on backorder for two years before the owner quit in disgust. There were lots of front-end collisions where various parts of the rider's anatomy had made permanent and perhaps final impression in the cold steel fuel tanks.

Hope welled up in the faces of two eager young boys in the quest of components for a '62 Victoria v-twin. They bought a rear hub for the shaft drive bike. Guys looking for Harley parts are the most often disappointed. H-D bits are in such demand by chopper and special builders that they seldom make it to a salvage yard before someone hears about them and snaps them up. Too, there is a considerable black market in stolen H-D and Triumph parts.

Scattered here and there were the oft-mended projects of the amateur engine tuners. Crankcases with neatly heliarced patches matching the tangential trajectory of the rods and vibration-parted special exhaust systems caught our eye. The most memorable piece was a BSA twin head whose single carb manifold had been band-sawed off and replaced by three separate manifolds. The project showed exceptional craftsmanship with beautifully welded seams and black anodized surface finish. Bill Gross said the head had three Amal Grand Prix carbs on it when it came in on an exploded engine.

Real examples of motorcycle-as-art-form rarely make it to the salvage yard, but once in a while there was a custom-painted tank or a piece of original metal sculpture. Motorcycle Salvage had an exquisitely crafted H-D 74 seat whose decor was a peculiar combination of old-west saddlery and vest-pocket monogram embroidery. A biker wanted to trade a nicely custom painted Triumph tank to Johnson and Wood for a stock BSA tank even-up. Allan Butts countered that a gold-plated tank wouldn't be worth any more than a stock tank unless the other parts of the bike matched it. The guy took his tank and went elsewhere to speculate.

The salvage yards collect, and mostly keep, many strange and wonderful relics. Some are relics by chronology and others by design. There was what had to be the oldest Velocette 350 single engine at Motorcycle Salvage, along with a small hori-

zontal engine called a Brock, and what must have been the original Villiers 125 two-stroke at San Diego Motorcycle Salvage. Johnson and Wood had two complete 75cc OHV BSA Beagles. One had "Snoopy" lettered on the tank.

Though the yard operators relish a certain amount of dickering, especially on multi-item deals, they tend to get rather belligerent when someone tries to pull a chisel. The most common, and easiest to thwart, is the guy who buys a component and then brings back his own piece to claim a defect. If the buyer doesn't have an exchange part to begin with the yard will simply mark the part sold outright in an inconspicuous place to foil the refund demander. None of the yards we talked to will guarantee any electrical or carburetor parts: they are just too easy to ruin by the average home mechanic. The parts are tested and inspected before they are sold, usually in the customer's presence, and then sold on a *no return* basis to prevent hard feelings.

After some fat years in the mid-to-late Sixties, and even until 1972 with English parts, the salvage operators had begun to feel an economic pinch after their English sources dried up. Then the concurrent introduction of the Japanese big bikes and the end of dirt-cheap Japanese spares in general breathed new life into the old dead bike market. Still, the yards are under continuous pressure brought about by the very nature of our economy. Skyrocketing real estate values bring matching rent rates and a yard cannot afford to keep any real junk. Slow-moving items have to give way to the big-demand stuff which brings a stiff price. Better to sell five Yamaha starter motors than keep that Velocette engine another ten years.

Although the salvage yards are certain to become far less romantic as we overpopulate our way toward 1984, a Saturday spent rubber-necking at your local take-apart emporium will be a looking-glass trip through wonderland.

The addresses for the salvage yards we visited are:

*San Diego Motorcycle Salvage
2676 Newton Ave.
San Diego, Ca. 92113
(714) 235-6261*

*Motorcycle Salvage Inc.
900 West Foothill
Azusa, Ca. 91702
(213) 334-5912*

*Johnson and Wood
13434 Sherman Way
North Hollywood, Ca. 91402
(213) 765-0355*

To find your local salvage yard, look in the Yellow Pages, phone information, or ask at the new bike dealers in your area. ●

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