



# BSA Empire Star (1938)

*The inspiration behind one of the most celebrated British scramble bikes*

| Model | Years        | Engine | Suspension                                                                      | Power (bhp)       | Notable Features                                                      |
|-------|--------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B24   | 1936 to 1939 | 348cc  | Rigid rear frame (no rear suspension) and a girder front fork suspension system | 18–27 horse power | Single-cylinder, overhead valve (OHV), air-cooled, four-stroke engine |

The 1938 BSA Empire Star 350cc was a key model in BSA's pre-war lineup, renowned for its solid engineering and sporting legacy. It served as the direct predecessor to the iconic BSA Gold Star, cementing its place in BSA's racing and performance history.

The BSA (Birmingham Small Arms) Company produced the Empire Star models between 1936 to 1939, making it available in both 250cc and 350cc versions, with the 350cc being especially popular among sporting riders. Its design and engineering innovations, such as its OHV engine and reliable chassis, set new standards for performance bikes and made it a favourite for road use and competition.

The Empire Star's success, especially in competition, led BSA to further develop the platform, resulting in the introduction of the M24 Gold Star in 1938 (initially as a 500cc model).

When British road racer Wal Handley a year earlier famously lapped the Brooklands circuit at over 100 mph on a BSA Empire Star, earning a Gold Star badge, this feat directly inspired the BSA factory to create the Gold Star model.

The 350cc Empire Star is thus regarded as the immediate forerunner to the Gold Star B32, which would later become one of the most celebrated British motorcycles in racing and clubman circles.

### Race history

From 1928 to 1964, BSA motorcycles won the prestigious Harley Scramble event at the Rope Works circuit in Mosman Park a record 14 times, more than any other manufacturer.

Before the advent of dedicated scrambler bikes in the 1940s, road bikes were modified for off-road racing, with riders riding to the circuit before stripping down and adapting their machines for competition.

In 1931, Aubrey Melrose secured BSA's first Harley Scramble victory, riding a lightweight 250cc bike and ending the big Harley 1200cc v-twin's dominance. Six years later, Jack Kiely became the second BSA rider to win, this time aboard a 500cc Empire Star.

In 1939 and 1940, the Junior Harley Scramble class was introduced, specifically for smaller engine bikes. Keats Wilkinson won back-to-back titles on a 350cc BSA Empire Star.

When racing resumed in 1946 after World War II, BSA Gold Star machines dominated the Harley Scramble after the war, claiming 8 out of the last 9 victories at the Rope Works circuit, which hosted its final race in 1964.

### Restoration

The 1938 BSA Empire Star on display was purchased in 2023 by local Mosman Park resident Andrew Maurice and a few of his mates. It was acquired from motorcycling enthusiast Noel Simmons, who had carefully maintained the machine as part of his passion for vintage bikes.

While the exact origin of this particular bike remains unknown, it is believed to have been originally purchased from Mortlocks, a well-known motorcycle dealership in Perth. Established in 1896, Mortlocks sold various brands, including BSA and Harley Davidson bikes through both the early 20th century and the post-war years.

Photos: [Left to right] The 1938 BSA Empire Star B24 350cc, purchased in 2023; Keats Wilkinson winning the 1939 Junior Harley Scramble at the Rope Works circuit in Mosman Park on a BSA 350cc Empire Star; and an advertisement from Mortlocks promoting the 1939 Harley Scramble winners.

