

Vic Sawyer

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Vic is an honorary member of the [Cape Vintage Motorcycle Club](#).

MASTER CRAFTSMAN

Veteran fitter and turner is still going strong after 92 years

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STAFF WRITER

HE WORKS with precision, an eye that reads true and with the patience of a nursemaid.

At 92, fitter and turner Vic Sawyer happily takes the controls of his milling machine and his lathe every day, to do the precision work his clients require.

The small size of his workshop at his modest Bothasig home belies the complex nature of the work.

His body may show signs of age and of a recent stroke and he might move with some difficulty but Sawyer has a mind as clear as a bell and one that contains a wealth of knowledge about the profession he has served for so long.

These days, Sawyer's work mostly revolves around repairing, or making, rare parts for classic motorcycles for which you cannot get spares any more.

Do you need a new hub for a sprocket? Sawyer will turn it and mill it

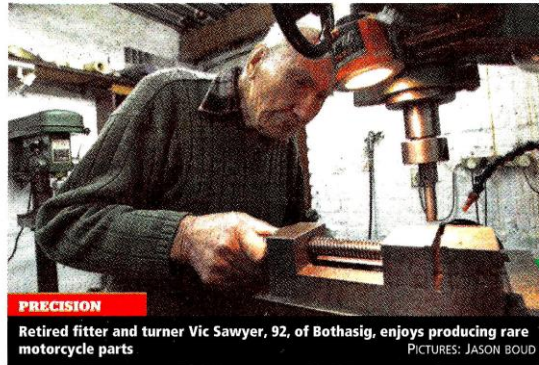
for you. Then he will heat up the sprocket, shrink fit it to the hub and tack it in. Or perhaps you need new bushes for a tappet rocker shaft. Sawyer will show you the shaft is out of round, will dress it with a perfectly sized sleeve and make new bushes.

To be able to do his work, Sawyer has had to know how to make his own tools. Tools that fit into the lathe or the milling machine and with which he can custom-cut parts.

"I started my apprenticeship before the war (World War II which began in 1939). I had left school at the age of 14 and had four or five little jobs before I got a job at an engineering shop," Sawyer remembers.

"I came to South Africa (from Britain) with my parents after the war in 1948 and I got a job in the machine shop of Robb Motors in Strand Street.

Sawyer moved on to other jobs in the automotive industry, some good, some not so good and in the early



PRECISION

Retired fitter and turner Vic Sawyer, 92, of Bothasig, enjoys producing rare motorcycle parts

PICTURES: JASON BOUD

1970s, was appointed by the Swartklop Products munitions factory.

"They needed the tooling and maintenance for the munitions plants which they bought from Belgium."

Sawyer became a superintendent before he retired in the late 1980s.

But he was ready for retirement. He had made plans. He had bought the lathe and milling machine by then

and began collecting machine tools and other bits and pieces.

"I knew I had to carry on," he says. "Apart from the fact that I had to keep my mind occupied, I loved this work. Still do. I never was academic. I cannot write well and I do not want to sit around reading.

"I still know things that most people never learnt. Some of the old motorcycles, for example, had bolts and screws with threads that come from systems vastly different to that of the metric system. I know those old threads. I know how to recognise them and I can still cut them.

"It is easy for a person to take a metric threaded screw and screw it into a thread that looks the same by eye. Maybe it fits loosely, they force it in and it breaks. I can make sure that does not happen."

"An old friend asked me the other day if he could buy my machines when I finally retired. I just don't see that happening," says Sawyer.