

THE SILK COMPARED WITH THE SCOTT "SPRINT SPECIAL" (Comparisons are not necessarily odious)

Titch Allen

Surely there cannot be anything odious about the comparison of two such outstanding machines. A difficult task, almost as difficult as comparing chalk and cheese, but not odious. Quite the reverse. My rides on these machines, alike in concept but separated in time by five decades and more, are among my outstanding motor-cycling experiences.

Inevitably one tries to compare machines one against another but it is another matter to put one's random thoughts on paper. Like a good Editor Jim Fotheringham comes up with the idea for an article, and like an experienced newsman Val Ward passes the buck, and it winds up with me, for it is true I have ridden Sprints: the John Hartshorne Special later owned by the late John Griffith, and in consequence now resting with the other delectable machines of the Griffith collection in the Stanford Hall Museum, and the rather more standard Sprint owned by Glyn Chambers, and I have ridden the Silk and the Silk Scott before it.

I should add that far from gathering dust, the Hartshorne—Griffith Sprint has been campaigned with great vigour in vintage events by John's sons Stephen and David, who seem to have inherited their father's forceful riding style if not his mastery of the pen.

It is tempting to say that the Scott and the Silk were inspired by the desire to put a reasonably powerful engine in a light frame and achieve a balance of speed, economy and rideability, qualities which are not that easy to reconcile, and that in essentials they are similar, give or take sufficient allowance for the march of time and technological progress. Tempting to leave it at that and put away the typewriter but I do not think the Editor would be satisfied.

So I must rummage around in my memories and see what comparisons I can make. They are both light and if all the trappings of sophistication were stripped from the Silk it would be even lighter: the flashing lights, searchlight power headlamp and the quite unnecessary (for my style of riding) second front disc brake. For my money (and weight) you could keep the rear suspension, because modern roads are so good I sometimes wonder if all this spring frame nonsense is worthwhile for an ordinary road bike. I do not think anyone will want to go trail riding on a Silk.

I ride so many rigid bikes that I expect to take some weight on the footrests and if I do not spot the odd pot hole in time, it serves me jolly well right if I get a clout up the backside. Who ever thought of anyone trying to take the bumps out of horseriding? It's the bumps which shake up your liver and make it so good for you. I digress. They are both light and in the same trim (which means stark naked) they would probably weigh about the same. The Silk feels heavier to manhandle because it is more bulky and has its weight much higher. The Scott could not have a lower centre of gravity with a reasonable ground clearance but the Silk has almost as much ground clearance as a trail bike—because it has a lot of potential suspension movement. I say potential because as far as I was concerned, my new slim line bodywork (no sugar, no starch diet) used but a trifle of the springing movement. The difference is of course that with the Silk, both wheels stay glued to the road, though you may feel some reaction from bumps, whereas the Scotts so rarely touch the road unless it is of billiard table smoothness, that one wonders how on earth one secures traction and navigation. The fact is that though the Scotts

leap from bump to bump, they do contrive to fly as true as an arrow. As true as a Silk in fact. But if you desire some comfort it can be arranged on the Silk by attention to spring rates without any loss of navigation, because the Sponson racing frame is designed to take the rough—which means the Isle of Man—with the smooth.

In the matter of brakes there really is no comparison. A Sprint with brakes in good fettle stops better than most vintage bikes, because it is lighter than most in its class, but stopping is not without its excitement. The back wheel hops; the forks dance of judder. The Silk stops as if arrested by a mighty hand, with no drama. It's mostly the front discs that do the work, for the leverage on the rear one demands considerable pressure, which is just as well. Much of the lack of drama about the Silk both in cornering and braking is, of course, due to the T.T. 100 or similar tyres. I really think they would glue a Sprint to the road—judging by the angle of lean the vintage racing boys use. Only a Velo gear box, for that is really what the Silk has, could be better than a close ratio Scott; and it really is. I would not think it is all that difficult to improve on the Scott clutch and I weep not for its absence on the Silk. I do not regard George's masterpiece as anything very remarkable, it being neither exceptionally light to operate nor gentle on the take up, but it is a no-nonsense ? turn out and more. I have made my opinions well known elsewhere about the awkward kick start. The Sprints had no kick start and somehow it seems perfectly natural to run and bump. You'd be half a mile down the road before the Silk owner had sorted out the kick start crank and folding footrest. In the areas of carburation and ignition, the Silk really shows the advance in technology. Gone is the need for "knowing the drill". Just turn on, switch on, lift the choke lever if cold and three prods from icy cold. One from hot.

On the road the feel of the two engines is not all that different and the difference is what you would expect. The Silk's top gear is too high for a straight comparison. If you put the Sprint maximum at an honest 85 or a lying 90 per, the Silk should really stay in third gear at that speed for a comparison. In its top gear it is not on song and is in truth over-g geared. Its extra power and torque enables it to pull a 3.8 top gear, which is tall enough for a 1000 big twin, and in this gear it is quite happy to lope along with 7-league boots. But in this gear it is not the screaming virago which is a Sprint when wound up. Sprints vary a lot vibration wise. Don't all Scotts?

The Hartshorne one is the rougher of the two and in typical hot Scott fashion, they feel as if the mains are shot when they really get going. If you have any feeling for tortured mechanism you are inclined to ease the throttle rather than endure the feeling of crank and rods pounding away. The Silk has the feeling of work going on down below. It is not a dynamo but the crank is so much stiffer and well supported that there is never any feeling of impending disaster. The tremors, vibro, pulsations, call them what you will, are constant and progressive. One does not run into calm patches and then into stormy passages as the revs mount, as one can do with Scotts. Whereas for these and other reasons like carburation and exhaust note one tends to find happy speeds for a Scott, the Silk isn't bothered. It's equally happy at all speeds. There's one thing wrong with the Silk though. It hasn't got the right yowl. Neither has the Hartshorne Sprint nor even the Chambers one, though its note was quite sensational.

In fact I haven't heard the proper Scott yowl for a long time, for as far as I am concerned you only get it with a forward expansion chamber and either a small tail pipe, as on the two-speeders, or a tail pipe with a



Titch at Cadwell Park, 1966, aboard 498 c.c. 2-speed Super, seen rounding the hairpin. Note the hand-clutch mod: "From the day when I first started racing the 2-speeder, after giving up big Broughs, and did myself an injury trying to run and jump on the gear pedal from the wrong side (off-side), I have always used the hand-clutch attachment: usually attributed to the late Donald Smith ('Wharfedale' of the Motor Cycle), but probably devised much earlier by Shipley lads like Billy Moore. It was a lash-up contrived the night before a Silverstone Sunday meeting, when it was painfully obvious that I could not perform the necessary starting acrobatics demanded of the 2-speed man. It employed bits from the scrap box and the garden fence, and like most lash-ups was meant to be replaced by something better . . . but never was, because it worked perfectly. The 2-speeder is in bits at the moment, being rebuilt as a standard roadster—it never was much else—and the clutch will be improved, because I would not like to ride a 2-speeder again without one. I raced the 2-speeder year after year at Silverstone, Cadwell, Oulton Park and Mallory, but never had to lay a hand on the motor which, following my normal practice with Scotts, was left standard."

Howarth silencer on the end. If you've only heard Scotts with Burgess silencers you've never heard the real Scott yowl.

What have I forgotten? Ah! Lubrication! Frankly I forgot all about it on the Silk. There was no undue smoke and no seizures, so the age long problems must have been solved. What on earth will Silk owners find to do with no sight feeds to peer in and adjusters to twiddle? As for the Sprints, settings were generous and I hoped the owners had got them right. The only time I feel relaxed with a Scott is when I have mixed half a pint of oil with a gallon and a half of petrol. The Silk did not seem to consume much oil or petrol either, by Scott standards, largely because at legal speeds it's just jogging along, which is something it will do quite well. A Sprint is not very good at jogging along—somehow it brings out the worst in you and you proceed in a series of yowls, punctuated by overrun silences. Perhaps the safest thing to say is that any resemblance between a Scott and a Silk is purely coincidental.

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