

SILK SCOTT TRAVAILS

I return to the saga of rebuilding my Silk-engined Scott which I was able to inflict on you when I was in the hot seat.

Horror story: the MoT should have been a breeze; everything worked until I took the first corner, and clutch, it refused to do. Back onto the hydraulic stand, and found that the builder had needed a shoe horn to get the gearbox and clutch into the frame, my guess being that he inserted them before the engine. There followed a wrestling match, happily being helped by a hydraulic jack to remove the clutch. Assumption that it was a Velo clutch to suit the box was dispelled, and phoning around England to find a Jawa stockist produced the happy discovery that Silk fitted a Jawa speedway clutch, presumably to get chain alignment, for some Silk Scotts have Silk gearboxes and it seems that on these machines the rear chains are not in perfect alignment. Also it seems that the 'hard' clutch plate inserts are not the best, perhaps the cause of the clutch sticking, and that medium ones would be a sensible replacement.

In case any other owner has a problem, the information is that the fibre plates are part no. Jawa 890 and cost £8.05 from Bellam, 5 Marshland Street, Terington St. Clement, Kings Lynn PE34 4NE. I hope this helps, for as far as I could tell during my *Yowl* days there were probably 23 Silk Scotts made, of which I found some seven in private hands, but to date only mine had the Velo box with the Jawa clutch, but you never know.

Again, when writing earlier about this model I pointed out that every owner I contacted had to rebuild to a greater or lesser degree. The problems were twofold. Firstly, although I believe the concept to be brilliant, based on a bike with a dry weight of 266 lb with sparkling performance and outstanding handling, there were some design faults which had not been sorted out, bearing in mind that there were many different engines involved. The test reports and articles written at the time showed that hypnotism by the concept prevented a closer scrutiny. The average reader then might have thought that the models were furnished with new engines. Far from it, as far as I can tell, the buyer provided his engine or else a much-used engine was found by Silks for the frame. This meant tremendous variation between models was apparent, just look at the photographs I printed in *Yowl* at the time.

Of course this can be fun for the competent engineer-enthusiast, but it is a curse for the amateur owner who fell into the 'new model, new bike' trap. I am not criticising this because I simply do not know what the would-be purchaser was told at the time, I only know what was written in magazines and books on the Silk Scott. I have no serious gripe, being of an age when tinkering in the work-shed is almost as much fun as spluttering along the road. I also have one or two friends with more expertise than myself.

These design shortcomings have been described before, briefly Ged Rumble dealt with the lubrication suction problem, I coped with the fixed spark which was a curse until given manual adjustment, the carb angle was far too steep and a flatter manifold was needed, the silencer needed some extra holes and stuffing, the kick-starter was a leg-busting pig and had to be changed.

The second range of problems came from the workshop. Some were irritating, male threads with a different pitch which stripped threads on removal, great fun. When I took out the clutch, having

cold months ahead I decided to check the wheels, which are on fine Borrani rims. The twin leading shoes on the Fahren front brake are great stoppers if only you can get them to bite evenly, quite a trick as the adjusting threads are both right hand. I decided to have the wheels rebuilt by that expert wheelwright in Cowfold in Sussex, Wheelwise. He told me that one of the spokes was proud of the nipple and would have burst the front tyre eventually, sending me over the bars. The wheels were rebuilt beautifully with a new design of opposing threads on the adjusting rods. This, with the new stainless spokes and polishing, proved to be a grand finish, all other parts being vapour blasted to a satin finish, for the bike has stood in store for three decades. The tyres and tubes also were replaced.

This might be a case for caveat emptor, but during my short occupation of the *Yowl* hotseat I was able to round up a the few Silk Scotts so that if you are lucky enough to acquire one — and I do get a few enquirers for mine — you should know what to look for. Happily those kind souls who sent me details of their machines, they had all been rebuilders, but somewhere there must be a dozen or so models we had not traced and one or two may turn up, who knows.

For myself, I have my own hack-bike, an aged Honda, and two wheels in my area are a boon, the four-wheeled folk sit in solemn unmoving rose in all of the roads in and out of our town, especially of a morning when mums start their kids off to school as couch potatoes. so it's no problem for me to take my time, and spread the expense, of putting Lazarus back into the world of the living. It is frustrating fun, too. You see, classic bike enthusiasts always have this problem, whether to stay true to the original concept, or whether to improve like those '47 owners who scrap the telescopics you had to pump up and renew seals. No problem for Silk Scotts for the design policy was to change, improve and modernise in its time, it was made as a test bed, and buyers and owners should continue that — there's plenty of scope.

But on the few miles I put on, it was shock, for I have a roundabout not far from my house, and tweaking in second gear suddenly brought in a blast of unexpected power and I was hanging onto the handlebars in shock. Yes, the bike design, for all its warts, came from a racing stable and it shows.

A final thought, I had believed that my Replica engine, bored out to 650cc it seem was about the biggest two-stroke. Then I visited that fantastic museum at that tiny village of Prickwillow in the fens to see the machines they used for pumping water from the land into the rivers — this is an engineer's Mecca. There was a huge two-stroke, made by Allens, with four cylinders that looked like the funnels of an ocean liner. It hadn't fired up this many a year, but I bet it sounded great. If you're ever up that way, pop in and have a look, but a word of caution, they want competent engineers to help restore it. I think its cylinder capacity was over 1,400 litres. I told the expert lady curator of the size of my engine and I think she sniffed.

And having pulled Ted's leg, may I end by saying seriously that I am delighted with the way he's carrying on dear old *Yowl*, it's in good hands, even if we seem locked into the mutton-chop whisker days.

Geoff Bucknall.