

Letters

Dear Editors,

I recognise the photograph accompanying George Silk's letter [Yowl, June 2021, page 107] and remember when it was taken. Unfortunately, there are two errors in George's letter. Firstly, this photograph actually shows Geoff Duke sitting on my Silk, talking to his son Peter Duke on the other Silk and not to Phil Read. Secondly, it was taken in early 1976, not at Thruxton but at RAF Melksham, where the Avon Rubber Company used the airfield runways and taxiways to test their tyres.

At the risk of boring everyone, I shall relate the story of this photograph together with my involvement in it. I collected my Silk from the works in early December 1975 and rode it home to Somerset. About two months later, I had a telephone call from Hugh Cundall, a director at Silk Engineering, asking me to take a day off and ride my bike over to Melksham for some filming. This I did, a week or so later, on a very cold and icy morning. I remember being very worried about skidding my new bike on untreated roads, but all was well.

When I arrived, I was greeted by Hugh who had trailed the latest Silk down from the factory. Also there were Geoff and Peter Duke and Bill Slocomb (I think it was) who had brought a Norton Commando and a Triumph Trident down in the back of his truck – both brand new and straight out of his showroom. Also there was a film crew with what seemed to me a lot of equipment, and some people from the Avon tyre factory which was just up the road.

The purpose of this meeting, hosted by Avon Tyres, was to film British motorcycles in action. This was to be for a Government information film promoting British industry, to be shown by our embassies around the world – I expect it still exists in an archive somewhere.

Shortly after my arrival, Geoff Duke commandeered my bike and rode it for the whole session. Peter was given the other Silk, and I think an Avon employee was asked to ride the Norton. I was asked to ride the Triumph. Filming, of us riding in various formations around the airfield at the behest of the producer, took all morning. At the end, the four of us were lined up for a publicity photo, part of which is the one published in Yowl with George's letter....the full photograph shows the lineup of the four bikes, with me on Bill Slocomb's Triumph alongside Peter Duke. If you look closely in Yowl, on the far left of the photo, you can just see the edge of my shoulder and the back of the Triumph, but the rest of me has been cropped off. Ironically, early on in the proceedings, an Avon PR man came up to me and quietly asked me to keep the Triumph in the background because it was fitted with Dunlop tyres. This I tried to do, but this is the only place I have seen the photo where I have been completely put in the background!

So, a long letter about a tiny picture, and I am sure George's version is more glamorous. But I have now told the true story, because I think the record in Yowl should be as accurate as possible.

John Hobley