

And just for once I will not keep you on tenterhooks until the last line to find out what was missing and why. Actually, as far as I am concerned, I have known where it is ever since its conception but the world at large has obviously not been privy to the facts.

The title alludes to the fact that when I contacted Clive Worrall a couple of years ago for some information and supplies he, as I assume he normally does, asked the frame and engine numbers. Because of the somewhat chequered history of this machine his reaction was not immediate, but emerged later as, 'Oh, I wondered what had happened to that engine'. At that time I think he said it was one of two engine numbers 'not accounted for' in his records. Perhaps in the Club we should also have a listing of Silk Scott's and Silks to round off the sterling work published for the Scott register and the Birmingham chronicles.

To start tracing the history of my particular machine we have to go back to nineteen fifty. No, this is not a printing error but recognises that the machine I have in my care is the modern equivalent of the oft quoted 'George Washington's Axe', with three new heads and seven new hafts. It started out as pure Shipley Scott and very gradually transmogrified into rather unique Silk Seven Hundred.

Move number one was when John Farrar bought a Shipley Scott of late '50 vintage when he was a student and immediately started to tune it for performance. This phase deserves a special story to itself, and includes the use of such exotic stuff as large bore Wal Phillips fuel injectors – no float but just gravity feed and a butterfly throttle – and much larger than standard holes in the cylinder walls. John soon found out that the cranks 'go bang' with such tuning and he was therefore among the first to ask George Silk for some of his special cranks. Deciding that he liked the resulting engine very much John was at the front of the queue for a Spondon framed Silk, into which his Scott engine could be fitted, when they were first announced.

As we would expect the Silk chassis specified by John for his version of a Silk-Scott was unique and was meant for some serious stuff. For instance the front brake was a massive double-sided nine-inch job. It was I think a Fahren prototype and I had then seen nothing like it and have not seen a similar one since. This was before George Silk had produced his own engine/gearbox unit and therefore the Scott engine was further developed by John, at one time having a single reed valve in the inlet port and later on a carburettor and reed valve on each transfer port instead. The poor cranks were saved further punishment by George Silks decision to produce his own design of engine and gearbox unit, and John Farrar was again at the front of the queue to order. This early Silk engine was therefore a retrofit to one of the first Spondon Silk Scott frames and the Scott engine was ousted – to emerge later as a vital part of John's Vintage Racer with more conventional carburation.

The intention from the outset was that the Silk would be raced and the seat unit bore the initials 'FNT' in recognition of the main participants Farrar, Noakes and Tinley.

John Farrar and Alan Noakes had been at school together, and Barry Tinley was a friend who raced a Manx Norton and other machines to good effect. Alan is a skilled machinist and was responsible for many of the modifications made in the quest for more performance. The resulting race machine was reasonably successful but before it could be fully developed was set aside, most likely when John went to work in Holland for a couple of years.

When I acquired the machine from John many moons ago it is fair to say that it was unique. The first item to go had been the alternator, to be replaced by a very effective Krober self-generating ignition system on the nearside. Internal changes had rendered the oil pump redundant in favour of petroil, and the water connections on radiator and cylinder block alike had been increased to significantly larger bore. The most significant changes once more were to inlet and transfer arrangements. The inlet port was completely filled with Plastic Padding and a massive aluminium block was bolted across the rear face of the cylinder block. This was machined to accept two of the largest reed valve units then available each fed by its own carburettor – the manifolds cranked to miss the frame tubes on each side. The final format saw these twin units replaced by a single central Mikuni carburettor of 44mm choke. The head gasket was discarded and the head machined to obtain a high compression ratio and, as a piece de resistance, John had designed a unique pair of expansion chambers. They had no apparent outlet for the gasses at the rear, just a little mouse face painted on the pointy bit. This not only served to win a bet but also reflected John's very quirky sense of humour. Apparently it does not matter where the exhaust gasses exit from an expansion box racing system as long as the exit tube 'collects' the spent gasses from the correct pressure zone near the end of the system. John had arranged for these 'bleeder' pipes to exit underneath and on the inside, hidden from view to a casual observer. To all but the keen eyed the expansion chambers were completely sealed at the normal output end. It was quite entertaining to take the bike through scrutineering, and even more so to ride off the circuit and present it to the perplexed noise invigilator.

As far as I know the power output was never measured, so anything I can tell you about its performance will be subjective and easily dismissed. I rode it – on the road – in that final form and found the performance phenomenal. It had all the flat torque-curve characteristics you would expect from a deflector piston engine and it just revved on and on in the gears. To say that I was impressed was an understatement. When I had overhauled it I asked a friend named Dave Duxberry to ride it at Cadwell Park and let me know his impressions. (Dave Duxberry knows how to ride. You will find his name amongst the winners names at Daytona. He was the first British Classic racer to crate up his bike – a single cylinder BSA - and test his mettle against this unique track, and he amazed the locals by pulling off a narrow victory. Dave Roper was beaten into second place!)

At the time of the Cadwell outing Dave D had put aside his Triumph Triple and was campaigning one of the 'new' Yamaha TZ 250's. Remember that these were also cleaning up in the 350 class when overbored to 251cc, they really did re-write the

rule book. David was amazed to lap Cadwell in exactly the same time on the Silk as on his TZ, but said they had absolutely nothing in common. The Yamaha was knife-edge power-band stuff and rowing up and down the gearbox to 'keep on the pipe'. In direct contrast he said the Silk was like riding an armchair round, long periods of calm interrupted by the occasional gearchange. The roadholding he classed as similar, which is not too surprising considering the origin of the Spondon frame.

Two fairly minor but recurring problems kept the Silk from further competitive use. The thin mild steel plate engine mounts welded in to hold the Silk engine had a habit of fracturing, which occurrence rather perversely reduced the tingling of vibration if anything. A head steady onto the head-bolts helped a little but did not overcome the problem. The most worrying problem was that – despite very generous jetting – the piston crowns habitually sunk and sometimes failed. It needed time spent on it, and had to wait in line. It waited patiently under a blanket for several years...

And now I not only have a plan but am also part way through the execution of it. The engine mounts have been completely re-jigged and the cycle parts are being re-fettled. Indecision about the reliability of the highly tuned engine has finally been resolved by the lucky purchase of an experimental and long ago abandoned cylinder barrel. If I can put this sorry set of barrels back into useable shape I will start the entire cycle off all over again. With something like standard porting and a single carburettor, no reed valves, I will build and run the bike and iron out all the minor oddments that rarely get done during a 'racing development programme'. The original racing barrels will be set respectfully aside for a while, but may re-appear in a slightly lower compression guise at a later date. Who knows, the Classic Racing Fraternity may eventually overcome their suspicion of Two-Stroke and we could see it back in anger. The P registration points to about 1975/6 so with an eye to a twenty-five year rule I suppose we ought to think of it as potentially eligible for Vintage racing.

That does seem so weird to me, that the modern bikes we used to muck about with as a contrast to our vintage Scotts are now themselves becoming eligible as vintage in their own right. Help.

At the time of writing, early in '05, the newly acquired barrels have been sent off for re-linering, the cycle parts are getting the once-over, and several other small pieces of evidence are starting to point to a new lease of life for this restless machine and its many manifestations.

Several months later my replacement Silk cylinder barrel is back home and tucked away warm and cosy. The wayward cylinder liner has been removed and replaced with a new item and the porting carefully matched to the original. All that remains is to carry out some external surgery on the cylinder castings and fit them to the bottom half, hoping that no other major work is found necessary. And if that sounds a little mysterious I will write some more, later on, about the origin of my replacement barrels that could justifiably claim to be at the cutting edge.